

GREAT LIVES

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Other volumes in preparation

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by HAMILTON FYFE

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PRINCIPAL DATES

- 1856 (Aug. 15). Born in Lanarkshire, Scotland.
1866....Began work in a coal-mine.
1879....Appointed miners' agent.
1882....Becomes a journalist.
1886....Secretary to Ayrshire Miners' Union and
Scottish Miners' Federation.
1888....Receives 617 votes out of 6,381 polled in
Mid-Lanarkshire by-election.
1892....Elected to Parliament for West Ham
(South).
1893....Establishes Independent Labour Party.
1895....Loses seat in Parliament. Visits United
States.
1896....Receives 1,900 votes out of 11,000 polled
in Bradford East by-election.
1899-1902. Denounces war against Boers.
1900....Elected to Parliament for Merthyr
(Wales).
1901....First Socialist resolution in House of
Commons.
1903....Operation for appendicitis. Resigns edi-
torship of *Labour Leader*.
1906....Chairman of Parliamentary Labour
Party.
1907....Starts on world tour.
1909....Chairman of Labour Party.
1912....Visit to United States and Canada.
1914....I.L.P. comes of age. Denounces war.
1915....Death on September 26.

CHAPTER I

THE MAKING OF A PIONEER

“ Looking back over the way I have come, I can honestly say I have never had reason to regret following the steep straight path of duty ; and, I may add, I have never yielded to the temptation to try the apparently easier way without having cause to rue it.”

Keir Hardie on his 50th birthday.

THERE was unusual stir and bustle in Parliament Square. A British House of Commons was assembling after a General Election. Members old and new trooped through Palace Yard to be sworn in.

Nearly all of them wore silk hats and frock-coats. Most of them drove up in their carriages. The scene was decorous, conventional, eminently Victorian. It suggested a system on a solid, permanent base. Men who in 1892 were nearing old age had no recollection of any other system. They could not believe that in England any other was possible.

For sixty years the middle class had shared rule with the aristocracy. Theirs was the lion's share. The interests of manufacturer had been preferred to the interest of property in land. Conservatives understood as clearly as Liberals that this must be so. The two Parties took turns in office, and though they might differ in their professions they did not do so in practice. Both upheld the ownership and management of industries by a small

governing class, for which the masses must work at wages fixed by competition. That anything could interfere with this did not enter the heads of the members of Parliament assembling at Westminster on August 7th, 1892.

Suddenly the notes of a cornet made the warm air quiver. There was driven up a large carriage, drawn by two horses – a carriage known as a waggonette. From it jumped down a man in flannel shirt, tweed suit, cloth cap. He spoke a word to one of the policemen at the gates of the “Palace of Westminster,” then he went through, and so into the House of Commons. His companions in the waggonette cheered him. The cornet-player gave forth no uncertain sound. Next day newspaper reports recorded the arrival of the new M.P. for South West Ham, an East London constituency, “accompanied by a brass band.” The blare of trumpets and the roll of drums were described by one imaginative chronicler, who noticed also “trousers frayed at the heel,” and guessed the absence of a neck-tie – incorrectly, it appeared.

What manner of man did his fellow-members see when Keir Hardie entered the House? A man with a head already described as “majestic,” covered with curling hair in which even then (he was thirty-seven) glints of silver flecked the golden brown. A large forehead deeply lined; eyes that could be stern, even contemptuous, but could also be “wells of kindness.” A man who had lived much in the open and showed it. A

man habitually grave, but with a smile of friendship that was like sudden sunshine on a mountain tarn. That smile was not often seen in the House of Commons. Hardie had no friends there, nor did he care to make any among his opponents. Many years later he was to propose an anti-guzzling league of Labour M.P.s pledged to accept no hospitality from members of other Parties. "We are only guys to them," he said. "We must not lose touch with our own folk." That was his feeling from the first.

For a few days there was talk of the bad taste of this man Keir Hardie in deliberately flouting the tradition of respectable costume (black coat, silk hat) ; and in seeking notoriety by the mode of his arrival at the House. He was sneered at bitterly by backward-looking people as "a sign of the times," but no one seems to have foreseen in the incident the beginning of the end of an age. That the election of "one of these Socialist fellows" to Parliament could betoken anything other than insanity on the part of certain electors did not enter the heads either of the Thoroughly Comfortable, who were doubtful even about Joseph Chamberlain's new idea that worn-out workers might have pensions of five shillings a week, or of the masses, who were cheerfully singing and whistling the music-hall song of the hour – "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay." It was clever of Chamberlain, many Conservatives admitted, to have collared this notion – picked it up from an address given by Charles Booth, the shipowner whose odd

nation shrugged its shoulders and thought of other things.

Yet, although this was the attitude of the British people as a whole, possessive classes and proletariat alike, there were groups here and there which knew Keir Hardie to be no ordinary man. In the mean streets of his squalid industrial constituency, in the mining villages of Lanarkshire and Ayrshire, were many who had awareness of his worth. In his grey-brown eyes they had seen the pitifulness that goes with nobility of nature.¹ They had admired his fine head and brow, their beauty heightened by curling brown hair and beard. They knew that his compact, square figure was a symbol of his well-knit, closely reasoning mind.

They had heard him speak from platforms, sincerely ; as a rule quietly ; yet at times with burning zeal. They had read his articles ; seen that his thoughts were offered to them simply, genuinely ; discerned from them what manner of man he was. They knew he had gone to take his place in Parliament, wearing the clothes he always wore. They could guess he would rather have walked there alone than have driven in the crowded waggonette. Their anger rose as they heard the gibes directed at him, not only by the privileged and well-to-do, but by foolish workers. That he should be reviled by those whose position he attacked was only to be expected, but it

¹ "The nobler a man is, the more objects of compassion he hath."—Francis Bacon.

pained and puzzled his admirers that the prophet should have little honour from his own fellows.

In his struggle for a Labour Party that should be independent, self-sufficient, he had to beat down as much opposition from the masses as from the classes. He found it scarcely less hard to convince the poor and oppressed of the necessity of Socialism than to win assent from those having great possessions. He was to fight from that August day onward, as he had fought many years before it, for the principle that government should aim at the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and should use every means, economic as well as political, to secure it.

In this endeavour he had ranged against him the trade union leaders, the worker M.P.s, the great mass of those whose cause he pleaded. Keir Hardie believed in democracy as the least objectionable form of government, but he never said he believed in the wisdom or even the common sense of the crowd. His nature and his experience saved him from that, and he never professed beliefs he did not hold.

When he was born, on the fifteenth of August, 1856, his father was a ship's carpenter, who could just manage to keep his family at home in Lanarkshire above the starvation line. They had a one-roomed house such as was common in Scotland. The mother worked on a farm. At six the boy began to contribute to the family living. He ran errands at first, then he was taken into a shipping office as a messenger. Schooling he had none,

save for a few months, but his mother taught him to read and was made happy when she saw that he was eager for knowledge. From Mary Keir her son James drew most of the qualities which made him a great man – sympathy, courage, perseverance, honourable ambition. David Hardie, the father, had not so vigorous a personality, but he passed to his son an intellectual honesty from which he never swerved. It was characteristic of both that when, as a young man in his teens, Keir Hardie took to preaching for a sect known as the Evangelical Union, his father, long an agnostic, tried to argue him out of it, and, when he was unsuccessful, said with great-hearted toleration that, although they disagreed about religion, they could be good friends still.

There was deep affection in the poor home. The pictures that those early days of hardship etched on Keir Hardie's mind – “scenes mostly of poverty, of hunger, of despair” – all had as their central figure “a small spare woman with dark hair and quick eyes.” She sits up in bed, thin and worn, a child at her breast, smiling through her tears, giving household directions.

“Or again, an early January morning in an attic in a country village. The only light is from a huge splint of cannel coal which blazes in the grate. She is going about preparing the morning meal, more nervously energetic than usual. A man, tall and strong, and an undersized lad of ten are dressing.”

One, her husband, is going forth to face the perils of the sea ; the other, her son James, to meet for the first time the darkness of a coal-mine.

“ ‘ You ha’e this consolation at least,’ said the man, trying to be cheerful, ‘ that sailors and colliers are the twa classes that ministers pray maist for – if that does ony guid.’ By way of answer she threw her arms around the boy’s neck and kissed him and then turned to poke the fire.”

More and more brightly burned the flame of affection as years went by. In a summer (1901) when the busy politician was kept “ on the trot,” as he put it, from one activity to another, he wrote that he had, during a week-end, “ been seeing London through new eyes. True, they have looked upon seventy summers, but they are still clear and capable. I had no idea until now that the place contained so many beauties and attractions, and henceforth I shall in some way feel more kindly disposed towards it. The eyes belong to my mother.”

When, two years afterwards, she died – she and her husband within the same hour – he said sadly that thenceforth praise or blame would be even less than before an element in his life-work.

“ Closed are the grey eyes which blazed resentment or shed scalding tears when hard, untrue things were spoken or written about me
Bk

and my doings. Silent is the tongue which well knew how to hurl bitter invectives against those who spoke with the tongue of slander, and stilled are the beatings of the warm, impulsive heart which throbbed with pride and joy unspeakable when any little success came her laddie's gait."

That Keir Hardie was always a realist, that he suffered from no illusions or superstitions, he owed to those parents of his. They were a clear-brained, high-hearted pair. They talked about death "as if it were an everyday incident in their lives. . . . Had it been a visit to Glasgow, three miles distant, they could not have been more unconcerned. They never even referred to any question of the Beyond."

"Fear of death [their son mused] must have been an invention of priestcraft. He is the grim King for those who are left to mourn, but I have not yet seen a deathbed, and I have seen many, where the White Herald has not been welcomed as a friend and deliverer."

That memory of the cold January morning when he was setting off to the pit for the first time dated back to his tenth year. For four years the child had been picking up pennies – or shillings, if he was in luck – to help his mother keep the home together. Once at least it fell apart. Among his childish memories was one of an eviction. He

stood with his mother and her other children in the road where their furniture lay. That he never forgot. Many occupations were found for the child so that a roof might be kept over their heads. Once he was employed by a baker at three-and-six a week, working from seven in the morning until half past seven at night. One morning he was late. Mother ill, father out of work, new baby expected, little brother down with scarlet fever – this meant short rest for the only bread-winner. He reached the baker's shop fifteen minutes behind time, and was warned that it must not occur again.

“I was told to go upstairs and see the master. I was kept waiting outside the door of the dining-room while he said grace – he was noted for religious zeal – and, on being admitted, found the master and his family seated round a large table. He was serving out bacon and eggs, while his wife was pouring coffee from a glass infuser which at once – shamefaced and terrified as I was – attracted my attention. I had never before seen such a beautiful room nor such a table, loaded as it was with food and beautiful things. The master read me a lecture before the assembled family on the sin of slothfulness.”

Two days afterwards, for the same reasons, the child was late again. He had left his home without a scrap of food in it. It was a rainy morning, and he shivered in his thin wet clothes. He was

told to go, leaving a fortnight's wages behind as penalty for his unpunctual habit. Almost distracted, he begged for mercy.

“The shop woman spoke with the master through a speaking-tube, presumably to the breakfast-room I remembered so well, but he was obdurate, and finally she, out of the goodness of her heart, gave me a piece of bread and advised me to look out for another place. For a time I wandered about the streets in the rain, ashamed to go home where there was neither food nor fire, and actually discussing whether the best thing was not to go and throw myself in the Clyde and be done with a life that had so little attractions. In the end I went to the shop and saw the master and explained why I had been late. But it was all in vain. The wages were never paid.”

But, added Hardie, with that reticent irony which bites more deeply than the most scathing satire, “the master continued to be a pillar of the Church and a leading light in the religious life of the city.”

That experience of bitter poverty helped to shape Hardie's career. He could never forget that there were always many helpless folk suffering as he suffered in his cold, bare home. He wrote in 1902 :

“Think what it means ! If you have never known what it meant in your own person to be

hungry and cold and to be cut off from food and fire, then your imagination will fail of the attempt to picture the state of these poor creatures. Thirty-eight years of storm and strife have come and gone since that December night when I learned what it means, and I shiver and my heart sinks now as I recall it. In fancy I go through it all again, and then the thought recurs that this night there are thousands enduring similar tortures. The thought is unbearable."

Hardship makes many who endure it resolve to put themselves beyond reach of it. Hardie was filled with the longing to save others from such searing misery. To that he devoted his life.

In the coal-mine where he worked from his tenth year there was more friendliness than in the baker's shop, though there was isolation, darkness, and at times danger. For several years he seldom saw daylight during the winter months. "Down the pit by six in the morning, and not leaving it again until half past five, meant not seeing the sun, and even on Sunday I had to spend four hours down below. Such an experience does not develop the sunny side of one's being."

Yet he was a friendly lad, on good terms with the men for whom he acted as "trapper." All day he had to open and close a door that regulated the air supply. He was alone ; there was no light but that of his lamp ; the silence was disturbed

only by the air hissing and soughing as it went through. Later he was a pit-pony driver, with a strong affection for his "little shaggy Highlander named Donald, strong and obstinate like the race among whom he had been reared." They were great friends, and drank cold tea from the same flask, which sometimes the pony would find for himself; then he would pull out the cork with his teeth and drink all it held.

Once boy and pony just escaped death together. At midnight came word that "the shank was closing" – the shank being the shaft up and down which goes the cage, taking colliers to and from their work. "Warn the men to come at once!" The pony boy did this; very quickly all were at the bottom of the shaft. But no cage was running up and down. The sides had closed in upon it. It was fixed half-way.

The rocks groaned and cracked, timber props creaked and gave way. Thirty years afterwards, his memory quickened by another colliery accident, Keir Hardie could

"recall every detail of the scene – the men gathered in groups, each with his little lamp on his bonnet, their blackened serious faces. The roaring and cracking, as if of artillery, went on overhead, and gloom began to settle on every countenance. Some of the more susceptible were crying, and I remember two by themselves who were praying and crossing themselves. Rab Mair, the big genial fireman, remained

cool and strong and did his best to keep up the spirits of his fellow-prisoners."

The boy felt sleepy, went to the stable where his pony was.

"After cleaning Donald down, I gave him a feed of corn, put some hay in his manger, and, rolling myself in this, kissed him, as was our wont, and then went off to sleep. A boy of twelve will sleep when there is nothing to do, even if he be cooped in a trap. How long I slept I have no means now of knowing. It was Rab Mair's voice – swearing, if the truth must be told – and some vigorous punches from his fist which brought me back to consciousness."

As he grew up, he was given other occupations in the mine, and in time became a coal-hewer. It was clear enough to those who knew him that he would not remain a coal-hewer long. He took up temperance work ; he did a good deal of preaching – much of it in the open air. In spite of the baker, he was still a Christian, and still believed some sort of institutional religion to be necessary. This belief he relinquished because of the difficulty he found in persuading "religious people" to be Christians.

Moved by the support which the South African War received from religious ministers of all the Churches, he declared that

"all the cold sterile apathy of the age finds its home in the pulpit. The roystering, human

weaknesses of the libertine, the drunkard, and the gambler are as virtues compared to the gilded, cold heartlessness of Churchianity. Christ never once denounced the poor, weak, erring sinner. He kept the invectives of His wrath for the clergy and the religious folks of His day."

But now

"the proud, bombastic self-righteous spirit of Phariseism dominates the Church and all its works. The modern Christian Church is a reflex of the modern business world, only more hateful because of the garb of the unconscious hypocrisy in which it is arrayed."

Why would not professing Christians understand, he asked at another time, that

"Christianity on its social side could never be realised, if it was to be interpreted in the light of Christ's teaching, until there was full, free Communism, and the very idea of private property had disappeared from men's minds. Christ did not denounce merely those who were rich. His gospel taught that life is the only thing of value, and that the possession of property comes between a man and the development of his life."

So he spoke in 1910,¹ and in the same address

¹ Address on Labour and Christianity, Browning Hall, London, May 5th, 1910.

declared that "the impetus which drove him first of all into the Labour Movement, and the inspiration which had carried him on in it, were derived more from the teachings of Jesus than from all other sources combined." He went on to explain that "those of us who have for many years past practically deserted the religious platform have not done so because our faith and religion have grown less, but because, since the Church thought fit to specialise on what it most unfairly calls the spiritual side of Christianity, it became necessary for some of us to concentrate upon the human side by way at least of restoring the balance." He was convinced, he said, that "for every one Labour man who left his church because of antagonism to its doctrines ten were driven out by the church's unsympathetic attitude."

It was not until he began to be active in the interest of the miners that Hardie felt this lack of sympathy: it showed itself quickly and unmistakably then. By this time, too, he had read himself into a world far wider than that of the Evangelical Unionisers. He was well into his teens before he could write, but he had read as many books as he could lay hands on. From early childhood he had listened to his mother's songs, to the tales of a grandmother which mixed up Scottish history with wizards and witches. These prepared him for *Tales of the Border*, which was the first book he could remember reading. Later he read *The Races of Mankind*, and, from an

ancient library attached to the church in the mining village where at one time the family lived, he borrowed the *Voyages of Captain Cook*, which "awakened a sense of wonder at the world's vastness and gave me an interest in native races," which did not lessen as time went on. *Scottish Worthies*, which told of the Covenanters, and a *Life of William Wallace* made him a "hater of official tyranny and injustice, and very tolerant of all who were fighting for conscience' sake—even where my conscience does not approve of the object."

That last clause illustrated his very unusual fairness of mind. He could honour anyone who fought for any cause fervently believed in, however little it might appeal to him. He was magnanimous enough to respect Gladstone for declining to make his acquaintance. "I was more than sick at the time of the attempts made to rope me in [to the Liberal Party of which Gladstone was leader] and it came as a relief to find that the man who had most at stake would not even appear to descend to such tactics as some of his followers made their nightly practice."

When Hardie was sixteen a friend gave him *Sartor Resartus*. He read it three times before he got a grip on Carlyle's meaning. Then he felt he was "in the presence of some great power, the meaning of which I could only guess at."¹ Next, by the light of a collier's lamp in his tiny attic, he went through *Past and Present*, and *The French*

¹ "Books that have Influenced Me," *Review of Reviews*.

Revolution. Boswell he read, too — delighted to make acquaintance with the literary and social life of Dr. Johnson's period. A little iron figure of "the great Cham" stood on the mantelshelf of his room in London. On the poetry of Burns his imagination was nourished from childhood. "I owe more to Robert Burns," he testified, "than to any other man alive or dead." It was mainly the poet's "liberty-loving spirit of humanitarianism" which stirred young Hardie, but he responded then, as always, to beauty and tenderness.

"I remember even now, after the lapse of nearly forty years, how my heart thrilled responsively to the lines 'On Seeing a Wounded Hare limp by' and I can say truthfully that I have never thrown a stone at bird or beast since. Burns expressed for me as a boy my better self and gave form and substance to my half-formed thoughts and vague feelings."

From a night-school, to which each boy had to take his own piece of candle, he took away little; but his efforts to inform himself and train his mind to the habit of thinking succeeded well. He read in the snatches of leisure which came to him in the pit. He taught himself shorthand down there, with writing materials of his own making. Pieces of whitish rock blackened by smoke served instead of paper, and for a pen he scratched with the small sharp-pointed piece of metal which

every miner carried behind his ear and used for poking up his lamp-wick.

This study and the ease with which he learned to express himself were soon to provide him with an alternative occupation to coal-mining. Probably he would have made a change of his own free will. He could have gone to Glasgow University, if a plan formed by some well-wishers had matured. They proposed to club together and pay his fees. He shook his head. He had seen young fellows who went to college lose touch with their own folks and gain little of value. Also he preferred to earn his own living. As it happened, he was forced to find fresh employment. His ready tongue, his fluent pen, his fearlessness, had made him a leader among his work-mates. It was not so much that he took the lead as that they pushed him to the front. He was asked to take the chair at meetings called to discuss grievances. He was a ready spokesman when deputations interviewed mine managers. So he became a marked man – a man considered dangerous, as one who was “putting ideas into the men’s heads.”

As far as he did this, they were not very exigent ideas. He wanted a living wage for miners, many of whom were then getting in Scotland as little as fifteen shillings a week. Robert Smillie, one of Hardie’s friends from boyhood, has told that even in “good times” colliers worked twelve hours a day for three-and-sixpence. Hardie wanted a higher wage and a shorter day. He

wanted, also, conditions in the mines which did not unnecessarily injure health or expose men to the risk of avoidable disaster. He wanted miners to be housed in something like decency and comfort. When Henry George, the Single-taxer, visited Ayrshire, Hardie, who had read his *Progress and Poverty*, took him round several mining villages. He liked to tell this story of their tour. In a one-room house, like the Hardies' own, the American asked the housewife where she did her washing.

"On the middle of the floor," she told him.

"And where do you do your cooking and baking and nursing, and the rest?"

"It's a' done here."

"Then where do you sleep?"

"We sleep in the beds there," she replied, pointing to the half-concealed boxes in the wall.

Henry George said this might be all right for a young couple newly married, but "what will you do when your family increases?" he asked.

"Oh, then," she said, "we shall take in a lodger to help pay the rent."

It was not a joke either, Hardie assured his friend.

But, according to mine managers, the colliers were well enough off. If they got larger wages, they would only spend more on drink. To make the pits safe would mean less money for dividends, and shareholders would complain. There were even reductions of wages in view, and the Lanarkshire masters determined to save the men from

being "misled by agitators." So they dismissed Keir Hardie and his two brothers. In their own interest they had better have kept him at work. For now he could give to the miners' cause most of his time. He started two small shops. One his mother stocked with groceries ; in the other he sold newspapers and tobacco. He earned a little, also, as local correspondent to a Glasgow weekly, and, after he married and moved into Ayrshire, he was made editor-manager of the *Cumnock News*, published in the little town where he made his home.

He had all the qualifications for success in journalism — an observant eye, a gift of vivid description, a mind that cut always to the core of the matter, emotions easily roused. He wrote warmly and with vigour. At times, when he was inclined to be literary, he descended to making "lambkins leap and gambol while their dams cropped the tender grass" and flowers "spangled the sward." But as a rule it was true of his writing as of his speaking that he "used words to express what he thought, not to sound well ; he had no nonsense about him and no cant" (so a *New York World* writer put it, when Hardie visited America).

His newspaper work, which he owed to his reading and his mastery of shorthand, carried him over a difficult patch in his young life. It brought in a regular, though very small, income, and left him time to organise the miners, who as yet could not pay enough for him to live on. He thought hard before he resolved to take this task

in hand. His associates in the evangelical and temperance fields warned him against it. Surely he would not be foolish enough to throw away his prospects as lecturer and preacher to become "an agitator." He had to choose between safety and risk. He had to decide whether he would be conventionally respectable, or a rebel against a state of society which seemed to him wrong and shameful. He had to think of his wife and his mother, and he did think of them ; but, when he consulted them, he could see which side they were on. Of his wife, he said once that, through all the hard times they endured together, "she did not offer one word of reproof."

"Many a bitter tear she shed, but one of the proud boasts of my life is to be able to say that, if she has suffered much in health and spirit, never has she reproached me for what I have done for the cause I love."

She loved it, indeed, no less than he did, and kept a high heart through all privations because of her pride in what he did for it. She was no active politician, yet she was happy to be near him in his triumphs. When he was elected M.P. for Merthyr, he witnessed, after the result had been declared,

"a sight I never hoped to see this side of the pearly gate. My wife was making a speech to the delighted crowd."

As for his mother, though she scolded him and made fun of him for being clumsy about the house, she thought he could do nothing wrong outside it. So, with full agreement in the little home, he made up his mind to follow his inclination. He set to work to build up a strong miners' union as the only means of forcing colliery-owners to admit the collier's right to a decent existence.

He soon found he had to fight, not only with the masters, but against apathy, ignorance, and superstition on the part of a great many men. One day, in a speech, he compared the energy and devotion of a trade union champion to that of Luther at the rise of Protestantism. Instantly a storm of protest and abuse filled the room. A large number of the miners in it were Irish Roman Catholics. In a fury they tried to attack him. This was worse than the fear and fatalism which led men to hold aloof. That superstition and intolerance were equally strong among Protestants he discovered when he took French lessons from a Roman Catholic priest. His enemies in the Miners' Union did not scruple to use this against him.

In Lanarkshire he found he could do little. There were many small strikes, and one on a large scale. Hardie advised against this, but the men were desperate, and, though they were beaten after six hungry weeks, their leader was not discredited. Indeed, he was almost immediately called into Ayrshire to organise the miners there. After a year's effort, they felt strong

enough to ask for an increase of wages. When this was refused, moderate though it had been, work was stopped, not by order, but by common unspoken agreement. No decision was made, no call to come out issued. On the early morning of a late summer day brass bands marched through mining villages, and were followed by miners of all ages. The processions grew and grew in size and number. Very few pits worked that day, nor for two and a half months after it. The men were driven back, in the end, by winter's cold, but their pluck and privations did not go without reward. Soon after work had been restarted, wages were raised, and a few years only passed before an Ayrshire Miners' Union was formed. When trade union organisers argued "you must have a union before you can have a strike," Hardie used to smile. "It's sometimes only by a strike you can get a union," he would reply.

As secretary to the union, he was paid £75 a year. To the Scottish Miner's Federation he acted in the same capacity for nothing. He was able to support his home on his salary, supplemented by his earnings as a newspaper man. But these were dwindling. The papers he worked for were Liberal papers. He had been until now a Liberal himself. He had come once more, however, to a parting of the ways. He no longer believed in Liberalism as the hope of the working man. Liberal employers were just as determined as Conservatives to keep the working man down.

Any sympathy they had to offer was reserved for the oppressed a long way off. "If the miners were African slaves or Bulgarians," Hardie wrote, "people would be found on every hand getting up indignation meetings to protest against the wrongs inflicted on them, but because miners are only miners nobody heeds them." He knew why. The Liberal Party was bound up with the economic system, which was then beginning to be known as Capitalism. That system, he saw, must be altered. Thus he moved further and further away from his Liberal friends and employers.

When he had got so far that he felt he must resign his employment, he was without an organ for the expression of his views in print until, in 1887, he started the *Miner*, a little monthly paper, with pages at first not larger than those of a book. At the end of the year it was enlarged – a proof of success – then it was turned into the *Labour Leader* (now the *New Leader*). In the first issue of the *Miner* Hardie showed clearly where his experience and daring thoughts were leading him. Scottish miners had not during the previous two years been taking home more than twelve shillings a week. They had been compelled to suppress their aspirations after higher and better things in order to maintain the struggle for a bare existence.

"The fact is the miners of Scotland are to-day in an hundred-fold worse position than were their fathers before them."

Yet the fault was not entirely, or even principally, that of the employers. The whole system on which wages were paid was, indeed, rotten to the core. Labourer and capitalist were partners. Why did all the profit go to one partner, while the other starved? Because the workers refused to look after their own interests.

“They have the power to obtain a proper wage if only they exert it. Let them realise this and positively refuse to sell their Labour for a less return than will bring them all the necessities and at least some of the enjoyments of life. Let them make war on the present system till it is abolished. . . . We want progress on these lines, as without it all else is but a mockery.”

Clearly this was not Liberalism. The man whose mind ran in this direction could not work with Liberals or expect their support. They would smooth his way. They would put him on Easy Street for life. But that would mean suppressing his opinions; it would mean playing false with conscience. Keir Hardie could not do that. He had a message for his fellow-workers which he meant to deliver. He saw a duty in front of him from which he would not turn away. He was guided “not so much by a consideration of policy or by thinking out a long sequence of events, as by intuition and inspiration.” So he told the twenty-first birthday congress of his

creation, the Independent Labour Party, in 1914. "I think I have shown that I can be a pioneer," he said, in the same speech. "I know what I believe to be the right thing and I go and do it." Now the right thing for him was to "cut himself off," as he put it long afterwards, "from every relationship, political and social, in order to assist in building up a working-class party."

That is what he did in the year when Queen Victoria was celebrating her Jubilee, and no one had any notion that a Scot in a little Ayrshire town was about to set going a movement which would completely change the complexion of British politics and make Socialism, then a word of either fear or derision, the chief issue in that field.

CHAPTER II

CLEARING THE GROUND

“ So long as men are content to believe that Providence has sent into the world one class of men saddled and bridled and another class booted and spurred to ride them, so long will they be ridden ; but the moment the masses come to feel and act as if they were men, that moment the inequality ceases.”

Keir Hardie, in the “ Miner,” 1887.

To many who read those words for the first time to-day, they must sound like fantastic exaggeration. Yet all who can remember what was the condition of the workers in the later Victorian age will testify that the sentence described exactly the state of feeling both among the employing class as a whole and, with few exceptions, among the employed. Bagehot had, in *The English Constitution*, one of the wisest and wittiest books ever written, described the social and political system of England as based on deference. He was serious, and he was correct. Everyone knew what he meant. Everyone who had studied social and political conditions agreed with him.

There were many grades of deference, some plain to observe, some so subtle as almost to escape notice. What the Victorian system chiefly rested on was the division of the people into two main groups, one consisting of men and women who, whether they worked or lived without working, kept their hands clean ; the other group

including all who did the rougher and dirtier work. There was among both a general belief that this division was divinely ordained, and that, while the clean-handed had a right to live in comfort, the mass of workers ought to be content, in this world at any rate, to exist on the cheapest possible terms. The very rare workers who lifted themselves out of their class and ceased to dirty their hands were envied by those whom they had left and superciliously praised by their new associates. They adopted at once the dress, and, so far as they could, the habits and the manners of "ladies and gentlemen."

Here lay the explanation both of the offended surprise caused among the comfortable by Keir Hardie's cloth cap and of the annoyance felt by the men who were supposed to be leaders of working-class people. That cloth cap was symbolic. The man who wore it had no intention of climbing the ladder that led from a lower social status to a higher. He had no desire to wear frock-coat and top hat. Nor did he wear the clothes which caused so much pother as a mark of defiance. He wore them because they were his ordinary wear. Only persons of small mind disturb themselves about matters of dress. That Keir Hardie had no objection to falling in with custom he showed once when he was in Paris. He and a friend were given, by Jaurès, tickets for the Opéra. Someone told them they would be expected to wear evening dress. The friend had dress clothes with him. Hardie borrowed a

suit from a waiter. The waistcoat did not fit, so he replaced it by a sash. When they took their seats, they found they were the only two occupants so attired !

Hardie was surprised by the stir which his cloth cap and tweed suit occasioned. Had a soft felt hat, which his wife ordered for him, arrived in time, he would have worn that, and there would have been no comments. What prompted the comments he well understood. He was known already as a man who resented patronage ; as one who did not intend to be kept quiet by social recognition, nor even by a minor Government office. Therefore his cap was regarded as a portent of change, and rightly so regarded.

When he saw that it had become, as it were, his trade mark or, varying the metaphor, his oriflamme,¹ he decided to make the most of it. He had something of the showman in his temperament. He was inclined, too, to wear what he thought becoming or impressive. His costume was always the result of forethought, never of chance. His "deerstalker" cap proclaimed him as the first truly representative Labour member of Parliament. He was the first leader of the masses to say, as Eugene Debs said in the United States : "When I rise, it will not be from the people, but with the people." He was the first to teach the masses that their interests would not be served by either Conservative or Liberal

¹ "Anything material or ideal serving as rallying-point in struggle," *Concise Oxford Dictionary*.

Governments ; would never be served until they had sent to Parliament members who would form a Labour Party, independent of the others, hostile to them, pledged to create a new social and economic order.

It is arguable that Keir Hardie was but the mouthpiece of the time-spirit ; that a British Labour Party would have come into being without him ; that by some other his work would have been done. This, I say, is arguable, but it is hard to see where that other could have been found. No Labour leader comparable to Keir Hardie in genius, in courage, in tenacity, in clear-sighted wisdom, has appeared since his day. John Burns was among the members of Parliament who entered the House of Commons in that same August, 1892, when Keir Hardie arrived in his waggonette. Burns was then, and for a long time afterwards, known to more people, considered the better man of the two. Hardie acknowledged this opinion when he once wrote jokingly that "leaders of parties send out notices to their followers when Parliament is to meet and the fact that John Burns has not yet taken to fulfilling this part of his duties accounts for my having been unsummoned." He would have followed then if Burns had chosen to lead. But Burns went the way of the "Lib-Labs," the trade union M.P.s who subordinated Labour to Liberalism. He ridiculed the idea of forming an independent Labour Party, and "privately did everything a man could do to hinder its development,"

when it had been formed. In the article which contained that accusation, never refuted, Keir Hardie predicted that within ten years Burns would be a member of an "Individualist Cabinet." That was in 1895. The prophet was only a year out. After Burns had joined the Liberal Ministry in 1906, Keir Hardie wrote dispassionately that "in his early Socialist days he fought magnificently, but had not shown himself the man to lead a forlorn hope or to stand alone in a crisis."

Yet, excepting Hardie, Burns was by far the most active and prominent of Labour leaders until Ramsay MacDonald appeared. To the value of the work MacDonald did towards the creation of the Labour Party, Hardie paid generous tribute. But MacDonald took the field only after the decision to create it had been reached, and that decision was due to Hardie's untiring persistence. He led what seemed at first to be a forlorn hope ; he was not afraid to stand alone. MacDonald could not have done what Hardie did. It is unlikely that anyone could have done it. Those who take the time-spirit view must explain why Labour Parties comparable to the British were not formed in France or Belgium, in Italy, in the United States, where conditions were equally favourable. The reason seems to lie in the absence from those countries of any leaders with Keir Hardie's imaginative vision and Keir Hardie's obstinate resolve.

Not until 1888 did these qualities become uppermost in his character. He had first been

attracted towards Socialism as a doctrinal system in 1885, though before that he had been what might be called an instinctive Socialist. From his boyhood he had been troubled by the question: Why is there so much poverty in the midst of abundance? He talked it over with comrades in the pit. No one had any answer, save that things were as they were because they could not be otherwise. There had always been poverty, and there always would be.

“Even men who were poor said and believed that, and accepted the existing order as something unchangeable and part of the laws of Nature.”¹

To Hardie came the conviction that poverty was neither decreed by Nature nor ordained by God, but was solely and exclusively the outcome of wrong relations between men.

“I was not then a Socialist. I do not think I had even heard the word Socialism. I certainly knew nothing about its principles but, just thinking in my own stupid way, I came to the conclusion that if there were a system of society in which co-operation, not competition, and common ownership, rather than individualistic aggression, obtained, the change would be for the better. I can remember how the idea grew that the prime necessity was that the workers of the country

¹ Speech, in Co. Durham, 1902.

should obtain control of the legislative machinery."

A man who reasoned in that way was ripe for Socialism. It fitted with all his thoughts. A Socialist convert in London went back to his native Ayrshire on a visit. Hardie listened to him with eager sympathy. From that time he began to tell the miners who composed his audiences that they must aim, not only at higher wages and shorter hours, but at a change in the system under which they worked. By 1887 he was writing that "the capitalist wields too much power in the present Parliament for much to be done in the interests of Labour." In 1888 the time seemed to him to have come for testing the Liberal professions of solicitude for workers' interests: he offered himself as an independent Labour candidate for a seat in Parliament.

This was the first time such a candidature had been put forward. It was not well received by the electors of Mid-Lanark. Only 617 of them voted for Hardie. A Liberal was returned with 3,847 votes, the Tpry got 2,917.

There was no direct Socialism in Hardie's address. He undertook to support the Liberal programme, and mentioned that he had belonged to that Party all his life. But his speeches showed that already he had ceased to believe it would do anything for Labour. The preference shown by Liberals for a Welsh lawyer (who later became an influential financier and was made Lord St.

Dauids) gave point to Hardie's blunt statement that they "cared nothing for the interests of Labour except in so far as these can be made subservient to the interests of the middle class." He urged workers to follow the example of the Irish and send to Parliament a body of members unconnected with either Party, like those who were captained by Parnell. He looked forward to the day "when the Liberal Party would be dead and buried and only the Labour Party would live."

This was a new note in British politics. It proved Hardie's foresight. He often saw clearly things hidden from other men's eyes. Thus he declared in 1901, when Socialism was taken seriously by very few, that it would be the dominant issue of the century which was just beginning. Five years before that he had sketched the causes that would destroy the Liberal Party – the coming together of all the champions of property into one camp, and the crushing out of the Liberals in the struggle between Commercialism and Socialism. At the time this was derided. In 1896 the Liberal Party seemed to be part of the natural order of things. Hardie was looking a generation ahead.

With the same clearness of political vision he discerned as early as 1906 the certainty that Sinn Féin, of which few people had then heard, would play an important part in the development of Ireland. He insisted on the necessity for disarmament as a means of preventing war at a

time when no statesmen holding office could imagine such a thing possible. He foretold, less than a month after war had begun in 1914, the coming of conscription.

Able thus to read correctly the signs of the times, he told Mid-Lanark electors that

“the time was coming when, in self-defence, the working-class would have to fight out in dead and bitter earnest their battle with those who lived off the working-class. Men who belonged to the working-class, and especially the miner class, had been so long used to rule from above that it seemed almost like sacrilege that they should take matters into their own hands. But they must do this sooner or later. Their poverty, misery and degradation would compel the formation of such a party. Those conditions existed because there was a class which lived on the toil of Labour and got far more than the Labourer did. Until this was altered the workers would remain in their present position.”

In this election contest were heard for the first time the stories about Keir Hardie being “financed by Tories,” and “living on the money of rich people,” and “doing very well out of politics.” He once at a Liberal meeting heard himself described to a gathering of Yorkshiremen, priding themselves on being hard-headed, who nevertheless listened pop-eyed, as

“ a cross between a sybarite and a glutton. My cigars cost from ninepence to half-a-crown each and I returned a dozen of champagne at eight shillings a dozen as my brand was twelve shillings. This was the sort of twaddle talked at every street-corner (during an election) and the sad thing about it was that working-men were found to believe it.”

He might have made himself comfortable and secure by accepting an offer the Liberals made to him. At the start of his campaign they had tried to intrigue for his withdrawal. The secretary of a body called the Labour Electoral Association was summoned. After he had been a few days in the constituency, he went to Keir Hardie, “ bubbling over with excitement,” and told him he “ had been in conference with them and it was all settled.”

“ In conference with whom, and settled what ? ” enquired Hardie, grimly calm.

“ With the Liberals, and you’ve to retire.”

Telling the story, Keir Hardie went on :

“ I don’t know what happened then, but I remember rising to my feet and he ceased speaking. Next morning he returned home.”

The power of Hardie’s personality and anger obliterated both plotter and plot.

Next the celebrated Schnadhorst, chief Liberal organiser, invited Hardie to meet him. He

received the canny reply that the independent Labour candidate would consider anything he cared to put into writing. Then Sir George Trevelyan, member of Liberal Cabinets, persuaded Hardie to talk things over. What he had to say was that his Party really wanted to see working men in Parliament, and would put Hardie up in some other constituency at the next General Election, pay his expenses, and give him a salary of £300 a year. Hardie disposed of this at once.

“I explained as well as I could why his proposal was offensive, and, though he was obviously surprised, he was too much of a gentleman to be anything but courteous. And so the fight went on.”

Hardie's election expenses were, in fact, paid by a Socialist woman writer. He looked forward, he said, in one of his speeches, to the day when he would be supported by his fellow working men among whom he had toiled for seven years. In the meantime, if he were sent to the House of Commons, he could keep himself, “like other men with brains.” He was not sent, however. His fellow working men preferred the future Lord St. Davids. Hardie was not cast down. With another flash of foresight, he told “the gallant six hundred” who had voted for him that “in days to come the great Liberal victory in Mid-Lanark will be remembered only in

connection with the stand you made." Perfect your organisation, he counselled them ; spread the light.

Within a month he was himself doing what he had urged upon others. Within four months he had got a Scottish Labour Party going. Its programme was definitely Socialist, including State transport services, nationalisation of land and minerals, State banks, abolition of the House of Lords. Noticing an inclination to jeer at membership not being confined to the "horny-handed," Hardie announced that, whoever was found willing to work with and for the Party would, peer or peasant, be gladly accepted as a helper. He went on :

"The weapon has now been forged. It is for the workers to use it. . . . Better a thousand times an open foe than a secret enemy. The wolf in his sheep's clothing is always most to be feared and the man who poses as a Liberal and yet refuses to support a shortening of the hours of labour, an improvement of the homes of the people, the organisation of relief works for the unemployed, and the restoration of land to rightful owners, may call himself what he pleases, but he is an enemy and as such to be opposed."

This forthright tone, and especially the Eight Hours' Day proposal, won many over to the new Party. Hardie reported this to a Marxist Congress he attended in Paris (though he never

actually took his Socialism from Marx), and added with the same vigorous emphasis :

“ We are a cold-blooded, practical northern people and in our opinion, if progress is to be made, it must come as the result of something more tangible than talking of a bloody revolution, in which nobody there believes and which would do no good there if inaugurated to-morrow.”

This more tangible something had now taken shape in his mind. It must be a break with the Liberals, a Workers' Party, separate and distinct, with Socialism as its objective. When he put forward this programme, Hardie was far ahead of any other Labour champion in that age. Not one of any note supported it. He was forced to begin, therefore, by attacking the trade union officials who sat contentedly in Parliament, accepting gratefully the small measures passed from time to time, usually in order to catch workers' votes, and making no effort to obtain for the masses more solid benefits. These men seemed to Keir Hardie to be traitors to the trade unionists by whom they were paid.

Describing the meeting of an international conference in London, he contrasted the “ fiery zeal ” of the foreign delegates, “ which always characterises earnest men who are fighting for a principle,” with the “ stolid (stupid some called it), heavy, dullness and slowness to anger ” of

the British, who were "not at all like men in earnest." Probably, he opined, some of the earliest trade unionists in Britain exhibited the same characteristics as the foreigners,

"but now that the leader of a Trade Union is the holder of a fat, snug office, concerned only in maintaining the respectability of the cause, all is changed."

In this vein Hardie frequently satirised the "Lib-Labs." They represented almost everything he most despised. In the *Miner* he wrote :

"If the truth be told, the working-man representative has not been much of a success in Parliament. As a rule, he is afraid to offend the proprieties by being considered extreme. He thinks more of his own reputation in the eyes of the House than of the interests of his suffering brethren in mill and mine. He desires to be reckoned a gentleman fit to take his place as a member of the 'first club in the world.' This will never bring reform. . . . If our [Labour] members are content with following the lead of capitalists, as hitherto has all but been the case, then the money spent in keeping them there could be much more profitably used in other directions."

Beside his indignation at what he considered the betrayal of the workers by men who supported, and were some of them supported by,

Liberals lay Hardie's perception that no independent Labour Party could be formed so long as these men had the confidence of trade unionists. He therefore attacked them whenever he could. He indicted Henry Broadhurst before the Trades Union Congress for assisting capitalist candidates at elections and for voting against the Miners' Eight Hours' Day Bill. Another miners' member, Charles Fenwick, voiced the general sentiment of the Congress when he scornfully called Hardie a Jonah's gourd that sprang up in a night and in a night would wither. It was an unfortunate taunt in the mouth of one who was soon forgotten against a man destined to win enduring fame.

Benjamin Pickard and Thomas Burt were fiercely denounced for neglecting the interests of the miners who sent them to Parliament. When Welsh mine-owners begged Burt to dissuade a Liberal Government from giving time for the discussion of the Eight Hours' Bill, Hardie declared there was "something sublimely ridiculous about a system of Labour representation which enabled a mine-owner to appeal to a miners' member for protection for mine-owners." Pickard was trounced for supporting a Liberal against Tom Mann, put forward by trade unionists as I.L.P. candidate at a by-election. What is the proper term, asked Hardie, by which to describe the action of such men?

"When a Trade Unionist does not abide by the decision of his Union and goes to work

during a strike, he is called a Blackleg, a Scab, a Knob-stick. In Durham not long ago the union men were advised not to ride in the same cage, smoke in the same cabin, or allow their daughters to marry blacklegs. In what respect is the blackleg in a mine different from the Trade Union officials who defied the decisions of the Trade Unionists of Halifax? There is no difference; these men blacklegged just as truly as does the man who won't carry out the finding of his Trade Union. This is so clear in the face of the facts that it requires no elaboration. The Trade Unionists of the country are saying so."

That was an exaggeration. Some trade unionists were saying so, but the mass remained torpid for a long time. It was only by obstinate repetition that Hardie made them understand they would get nothing worth having out of Liberals or Tories unless they had a numerous and active Party of their own. Week after week in the monthly *Labour Leader*, into which the *Miner* had been turned, he argued in this simply eloquent strain :

"Are we to wait for Labour reforms until it pleases one or other of the political parties to introduce them, or are we to have an Independent Labour Party which will fight Liberal Sweaters of Labour – of whom there are many in Parliament – and Tory sweaters of labour alike ?

“ Is Labour to be for ever the sport and plaything of scheming politicians, and are we to be dependent for ever on rich men to make and administer our laws ?

“ We say no. We claim for the workers the right, not only to vote, but to select their own champions. We point to the fact that Labour is being robbed by landlord and capitalist, that the Liberal and Conservative Parties are bossed, managed and controlled by landlords and capitalists in the interest of land and capital. We seek to bring about a Co-operative Commonwealth in which land and capital shall be the property of the community, and the wealth resulting from Labour shall be the common property of all who render useful service to the community, and in order to bring this about we believe in the need for an Independent Labour Party to work unceasingly for its realisation.

“ The Liberal-Labour members are opposed to all this. They put the interests of a political Party before the interests of Labour. They know that, when we succeed, their day is over, and so they are opposed to us. They are not above using the vilest misrepresentations concerning the I.L.P. movement – such as that we are financed by Tories and are working in the interests of the Tory Party.”

Hardie was blamed by many, even by some who shared his convictions, for his onslaughts

on the "Lib-Labs." He did not, it is true, make allowances for the political atmosphere in which his victims had been brought up. He did not take into account their many services to the cause of Labour. He expected all of them to see as clearly as he did the realities of the political situation. He shut his eyes to everything but their defection from his ideal of what Labour M.P.s should be. They were obstacles in his way ; he was determined to remove them, no matter what means he employed.

Hardie was a man of one idea – a great idea, fruitful and necessary. Towards the realisation of his idea he plunged with headlong energy. By his energy, concentrated and unwearied, he detached Labour from Liberalism, gave it the force and zeal of a revolutionary movement, set its feet firmly on the path leading to Socialism. He could not have done this if he had been gentle in controversy, tolerant of opposition. His faith was not a quietly burning candle ; it was a searing, scorching flame.

Those whom it scorched and seared hated him, sought for opportunities to discredit his judgment, his honesty. The "Lib-Labs" spoke of him in private, and in public as far as they dared, with fury. Liberals were scornful rather than furious. They had nothing immediate to lose. They did not fear him. His stings hardly even annoyed, so proudly sure did they feel that their Party could never disintegrate. If they had been told that Keir Hardie was undermining its

foundation, taking away the support of the mass of workers without which it could not survive, they would contemptuously have smiled.

Neither hatred nor scorn affected Hardie. He sought nothing either from those who detested or from those who despised him. He could not be intimidated nor bought. In speech and writing he beat his policy into the heads of those who would read or listen. Because the "Lib-Labs" put their Liberalism first, they must be replaced by M.P.s who would put Labour first. Because the Liberals had lost their enthusiasm for social improvement, the workers must have their own Party.

He could, he admitted, remember the time when the Liberal rank and file was tinged with the ardour for far-reaching changes.

"The first Radical movement was inspired by the ideal of political equality, and it went to pieces when the Whigs compromised with the Leaders of Radicalism and with their own principles by passing the Reform Act of 1832. Again we find it flaring out in the Chartist movement, until once more the leaders sold the pass, and Chartism sank in a whirlwind of bitter curses and personal wranglings. The rails of Hyde Park had to go down before the wrath of an angry people ere the Commons would pass the Boroughs Enfranchisement Act, and I well remember 1884, when we all marched and cheered to the watchword of

'Down with the Lords.' Those were the days when Liberalism was triumphant and arrogant, for behind it was the irresistible impulse of a people fighting for freedom."

"Now," he hammered away in other articles,

"Liberalism has fallen on evil times because it has no longer a great inspiring, unifying principle behind it. . . . It is a bundle of inconsistencies, bound together by the Party tie, which, the moment it is attempted to be used, splits up into its mutually destructive elements. . . . It is no longer a modern movement. It lives in a past which is not without its glories but which is associated with a form of selfish cruelty towards the common people for which history supplies no parallel. Its philosophy of life was 'the race to the swift and the battle to the strong,' which, were we a race of ghouls, might be acceptable, but which is unworthy of human beings. 'Each for himself' is a motto which presupposes that selfishness is the golden rule of life, whereas experience and morality combine in proving it the way of death."

In a lecture to the members of the Fabian Society he told them they were "a positive danger to the Socialist Movement" when they advocated "the capture of the Liberal Party," which should then be used to accomplish their objects.

“ On the face of it, that looks plausible and simple. But consider for a moment. The bulk of the Socialist Party is composed of the working classes who toil nine, ten or eleven hours every working day of their lives in mine, workshop and factory, earning a meagre subsistence for themselves and their dependants. They have not had the advantage, or disadvantage, of a commercial training – that sharpening of wits and instincts which makes conscience and principle secondary matters to the great gospel of ‘ getting on ’ ; they have no knowledge or skill in the art of ‘ beggar my neighbour.’

“ And what is the Liberal Party they are invited to capture ? It has great wealth behind it, social influence, territorial influence – for notice that even the dukes are going back to it ; they recognise it is a harmless sort of animal, not likely to do them much injury. It has behind it a powerful, unscrupulous Press, the legal intellects of the country are at its service. The workers are asked to capture this Party and use it for their own purpose to bring about its own destruction.”

On this plan Hardie poured derision and invective.

“ To perpetuate the fiction that Liberalism, any more than Toryism, is going to help to realise Socialism is but to play into the hands of the class of monopoly.”

Later, he attacked the *Clarion* group's proposal, which had the support also of Hyndman and Tom Mann, that Socialists should "modify their programme so as to secure the co-operation of the democratic members of Parliament, a majority of leading literary men and artists, an army of clergymen of all denominations, most of the Labour leaders," and the editors of several Liberal newspapers. Another plan for making Socialists "an impotent caudal appendage of the Liberal Party," Hardie declared. No alliance was possible, because the Liberals, led by astute and crafty politicians, could not alter their attitude towards Socialism. They must be hostile, since they represented employers. Do not, he urged, mistake a will-o'-the-wisp for an honest light and flounder into a quagmire. "In all movements there have been those who have put on their armour without counting the cost, or who have failed to see the end from the beginning, and these, grown weary of the strife, have sought a short cut to the end in view." But he "would be no party to betraying the Socialist movement into the hands of its enemies."

The desire for a short cut cannot be pondered without some sympathy by anyone familiar with the period which brought the nineteenth century to a close. The Liberals had all the advantages which Keir Hardie named. They had also a powerful tradition behind them. It was hard to believe they could be superseded, left behind. But, while others saw only with the

eye of the flesh, Hardie used the eye of faith. This lent him courage to stand alone. This emboldened him to give up, in 1891, his paid position as President of the Ayrshire miners.

“It was rather a risky thing to do and I knew it. However, it had to be done. Ever since the Mid-Lanark election (1888) the feeling had been growing upon me that the great weakness in the working-class position was their blind adhesion to Party politics. The paid official of an organisation cannot very well be a pioneer. His members in the bulk are sure to be against him, which means much discord and loss of power. So I resigned my job.”

This left him free to look for another body of electors who might send him to Parliament. He was recommended to try South West Ham, a constituency in the grimy, poor, industrial East End of London, where dock labourers and other unskilled workers formed the bulk of the population.. His Ayrshire miners undertook to pay his election expenses and a salary of £200 a year, if he were successful. His candidature was welcomed ; soon it was being said that he had every chance of success.

By this time he had worn down much of the hostility which his familiar ideas aroused among the workers. At the Trades Union Congress he was no longer jeered at and shouted down :

he was listened to, and "seemed almost annoyed," according to a friendly observer, "when he got a quiet hearing for the first time." This was in 1890. It did not mean that trade unionists were yet ready to follow him. Only eleven members of the 1891 Congress voted for his proposal to create a Parliamentary Fund. The next year his motion for an Independent Parliamentary group was defeated by 119 votes to 96. Still, he was clearly winning the unions over by slow degrees. He could truthfully assure the South West Ham electors that "what is known as the Labour Movement has taken firm hold of the country." The many strikes, the revolt of the unskilled, and the formation of trade unions among them, the larger space given by the Press to social conditions, prepared the ground for his efforts. He was no longer considered either a wild man of no enduring substance or a nuisance with one idea. He was still far from victory, but he had cleared the ground for an advance. When he was sent to the House of Commons, by 5,268 Londoners' votes against the Conservative's 4,036, a new stage in his struggle began.

CHAPTER III

THE AGITATOR

“ I am an agitator. My work has consisted of trying to stir up a divine discontent with wrong.”

Keir Hardie, at the Albert Hall, London, 1908.

ALL agitators, all who have tried to awake in the human spirit anger against injustice, the hope of a larger life, have earned the ill will of their kind. Some have been crucified, some burned in the fire, some driven to despair – all have been held up to obloquy. Even those who have survived, outworn their detractors, accomplished their tasks, have born marks of the experience, have carried about with them mournful memories.

Keir Hardie was not by nature sad or solitary. When he recalled early memories, he would say that those of his boyhood and young manhood were gloomy. “ Under no circumstances, given freedom of choice, would I live that part of my life over again.” Not till he knew “ the main secret of human existence – that he who would find his life must lose it for others ” – could he perceive any real meaning in it. Yet it is on record that he was a cheerful youth in spite of hardships and bitter recollections, that he sang and danced, even played the flute and concertina. All through his life he liked to join in a Highland reel and the singing of Scottish songs. He enjoyed a joke. He was happy in his home, devoted and

proud of wife and bairns. Yet he was visited oftentimes by a sadness of spirit because he felt that his work "has cut me off from communion with my fellows, because I cannot somehow enter into the healthy and legitimate light side of life." He liked, when he could not be at home in Scotland, to live by himself. Even when he was at home, he enjoyed most the quiet dark hours when he wrote by candlelight amid stillness.

"Outside the twinkling stars are keeping watch over a silent world. What a blessed thing is the holy calm of this home retreat! Not a sound to be heard save the slow tick of the old grandfather clock on the stairs and the soothing murmur of the Lugar water at the foot of the garden. London is a place which I remember with a haunting horror, as if I had been confined there once in some long-ago stage of a former existence. The weary feet on the pavement, the raucous song, the jingle of cab-horse bells and – the babble of St. Stephen's (the House of Commons). Were they real? God knows. Enough for the moment that they are not here. Here there are warm hearts and peace. Where these are, heaven is."

No politician, enjoying for their own sake the struggle and the shouting and the crowded assembly, could have written so. Hardie was not, could not have been, a politician of that customary type. He was a mystic. In him

dwelt the stuff that saints are made of. He was moved by deep and tender pity for the suffering and oppressed. That he loved his fellows is proved by his lifelong work for them. But he was more at peace with skies and sea and mountains around him than among the works and the voices of men. He loved to sit on the Terrace at Richmond, looking over the Thames, and listening, on spring evenings, for a nightingale in some thicket on the hill. He often escaped from the House of Commons into one of the parks. In Kensington Gardens he never tired of the Dutch Garden or the gulls of the Round Pond.

In the Welsh mining valleys, even on "a thunderous evening with the hills draped in gloom," it jarred on his feelings to see the virgin beauty of nature outraged by ugly pit-heaps which were left after the mineral wealth had been exhausted. His eye was enchanted and his mind set dreaming by Wemyss Bay in the sunshine, with "its gleaming waters, its wailing sea-birds, the hills backed by the West Highlands, the veined rocks of Arran in their afternoon robe of royal purple, the fleeting play of light and shadow on the hillsides" — though he could not help "frequently cursing it all," because "thousands of pain-stricken poor, tossing and moaning in the midst of dirt and noise, on hot beds in cheerless homes, harassed by thoughts of debt and hurried off to work ere they are half well," could not be with him "to have their pain soothed and their racked bodies and wearied

spirits restored to health and cheerfulness by the healing, soothing power of water, pure air, good food and kindly attention."

Without daring to doubt the sincerity of his outburst, one can picture Keir Hardie, when the thousands arrived, leaving hastily to find some spot where he could be alone.

In London he preferred solitude to company. He found it "more than irksome, it is demoralising, to live always under the necessity of having to speak and to be spoken to, to smile and look pleasant. Companionship is good, but solitude is best." Language like that is used only by men who have been driven in upon themselves.

All who bind themselves to a cause, and have intellect enough to know how causes are advanced, must be so driven. Hardie admired Parnell; admired him because he (like Hardie himself) had a single-track mind; admired the character of a man who made himself hated, would not yield ever to what were called "the decencies of public life," treated adversaries of the Irish cause not as political opponents, but as personal enemies. That was how a leader, struggling to free a nation or a class, should conduct himself, Hardie felt. He took this view, and acted upon it. Already, before he was sent to the House of Commons, he had earned unpopularity among his own people by persistently telling them the truth. Now he was to incur abuse and detestation on a wider scale.

It was to be expected that the character of one

who saw so clearly the need for a Labour Party, independent and unfettered by alliance with any of the forces opposed to Socialism, would be marked by independence. In Keir Hardie that estimable quality grew to be, in the opinion of many, a defect. Yet he could not have done his work without it. He relied on his own judgment. He was impatient with any who questioned its rightness. He took such action as he thought fit, when he thought fit. One of his biographers declares that to be subject to the will of the majority, as he was supposed to be when the Parliamentary Labour Party came into play, was "a condition of things very welcome to him." He said so ; he may even have thought that he welcomed a sharing of responsibility. He spoke of himself as not possessing sufficient pride to lord it over others, which was eminently true. But when he said that "Nature had not intended him to be a boss," he was unduly modest. His disinclination to take office, even in the Independent Labour Party, sprang from his wish to be "free from all trammels or restraints so as to be able to follow my inward light whithersoever it might lead." But no man was ever more plainly equipped by Nature with the mind and character of a spiritual and social pioneer.

He was entirely free from arrogance. He never, even in thought, claimed superiority. But his firm belief was that he knew best what decisions to take, and his impulse to take them without consulting anybody usually prevailed.

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He let this be seen in an article describing what he would do if he were appointed dictator in Britain. He would govern, he said, through a commission of three, "two of them deaf and dumb." He was convinced that one man could always do a better job than a committee, especially if that one man were himself.

At one moment he seemed ready, as we have seen, to accept the leadership of John Burns. At another moment he made an appeal to John Morley to "fuse working-class movements with the very earnest Liberals who were thoroughly ashamed of modern Liberalism and anxious to put themselves right with their own consciences." He put to Lloyd George, while he was making his name in Parliament, the query

"whether you will prove a real leader of men, animated by a great principle, seeing the end from the beginning, accepting without a murmur whatever the day's work may bring, and all the while inspiring men to noble deeds and lifting the life of the nation to a higher place; or whether, becoming a mere office-seeker you will lose your own self-respect, that greatest of all losses, and by your example drag the people down still further into the Slough of Despond and the gloom of unbelief."

Stirring, splendid words. They provoked no answer. Not for many years was Lloyd George to discover for himself that Liberalism, as Hardie

put it, "was, whatever it may have been, now a council of despair."

But, even supposing that he, or John Morley, or John Burns, had stepped forward as leader, one cannot imagine Keir Hardie as an obedient, self-effacing follower. His genius lay in the opposite direction. He was self-assertive, not as most men are, from weakness, but from strength. He had to be prominent because he was so unlike other men ; intellectually so much more vital, morally so much less afraid to speak his thought. A man who self-consciously pushed himself forward would have seized early opportunities to speak in the House of Commons. Hardie waited. Except for some questions, he held his peace. It is true that his questions from the first had something of the devastating penetration which inspired Bernard Shaw to write that

"when Keir Hardie rose to ask questions, there was only one thing for the Front Bench to do, and that was to lie—lie impudently, snobbishly, spitefully, Pecksniffianly, Tartuffily, in the face of records that littered the earth and facts that blotted out the sky, until at last we asked whether, if the Government could not produce a gentleman to stand up to a real man, it could not at least produce a respectable liar, a brazen thundering liar, a liar with conviction and a purpose, a creature with some strength of evil in him to test the strength of good in his challenger."

Hardie used the right of M.P.s to ask questions with a skill which made it even more useful than the right to make speeches. For there were many matters on which Governments would not permit debate, and, even when debate was permitted, it often happened that a member wishful to speak was not called upon by the Speaker. Also it might easily be that points made by speakers received no answer from the Government benches. Questions, however, could be asked every day, and some reply had to be given. How valuable they can be in instructing public opinion was shown by Hardie's questions during a dock strike. No discussion could be raised as to the issues or the methods employed to defeat the workers, yet day by day the nation learned how the ship-owners refused to negotiate, how the Government sent soldiers and sailors to Hull "to aid the ship-owners in breaking up a trade union registered under an Act of Parliament," how soldiers were set to load and unload ships, how the local bench of thirty-nine magistrates included four ship-owners, nineteen shareholders in shipping companies, no working men, and so on.

This was in the year (1893), when the Independent Labour Party was formed. No more forcible argument for the need of it could have been found. Looking back twenty-one years afterwards, at the Party's coming-of-age conference, Hardie sketched some of the conditions existing at its birth. There was much

bitter fighting industrially. Anyone who mentioned seriously such proposals as eight-hour day, minimum wage, right to work, municipal housing schemes, was classed as a fool. Even safety regulations in mines and factories were denounced as interference with the freedom of the individual. It was regarded as an offence against the laws of nature and ruinous to the State for public authorities to give food to starving children or aid poor old people without taking their independence away.

“ These cruel heartless dogmas were backed up by quotations from Jeremy Bentham, Malthus and Herbert Spencer, and by a bogus interpretation of Darwin’s theory of evolution ; were accepted as part of the unalterable laws of nature, sacred and inviolable, and were maintained by statesmen, town councillors, ministers of the Gospel, and, strangest of all, by the bulk of the Trade Union leaders. That was the political, social and religious element in which our Party saw the light.”

It was committed to Socialism from the start. Hardie had determined on this, and was able to bear down the opposition of the trade union delegates, who voted against it. Now he had a body of pledged followers, and soon he was in control of a weekly paper such as had long been in his mind. This was the *Labour Leader*, till now a monthly : it gave Hardie the opportunity to make known without delay the Socialist view of all public events.

This was not a Marxian view. Neither at that time nor at any time was Hardie in full sympathy with the doctrines of the *Communist Manifesto* and *Das Kapital*. He was not, indeed, more than casually acquainted with them. He did not like the expression "class war." "Socialism," he said, "makes war upon a system, not upon a class." He was no believer in the necessity for violent revolution.

"No revolution can succeed which has not public opinion behind it, and when that opinion ripens, it, as we have seen over and over again, breaks down even the walls of self-interest."

If, however, self-interest did not submit when Socialists, having placed a clear issue before the electors, secured control of the Government of the country, he saw that they must be dealt with as treasonable insurgents. And Hardie was sometimes of opinion that this was likely to happen.

"The property owners will probably try to rebel, in which case they will be treated as rebels always have been."

So there was not a vast difference between Hardie's view that violence would probably have to be used and Marx's belief that it must be. Indeed, so pronounced a Marxian as Moritz Beer, who wrote the *History of British Socialism*, said that

“ of all British Socialists none, in my judgment, has grasped the essence of modern Socialism – aye, of Marxism – better than Hardie. . . . What is the essence of modern Socialism as Marx taught it? The political independence of Labour. And what is the foremost duty of a Socialist in the class struggle? To divorce Labour from the parties of the possessing class. All that Keir Hardie has done, more by virtue of a practically unerring proletarian instinct than by theorising and speculating.”

Hardie was so little of a theorist or speculator that he was repelled by the work of Marx and Engels : “ it does not touch one human sentiment or feeling . . . it entirely leaves the human element out of account.” He arrived at Socialism by the emotional, not by the intellectual, road. But he very quickly reached its scientific basis. A year before he entered Parliament he wrote this passage into the Rules of the Ayrshire Miners’ Union :

“ All wealth is created by Labour. Capital is part of this wealth which, instead of being consumed when created, is stored up and used for assisting labour to produce more wealth. If all land and capital were owned by those who produce wealth, the wages of labour would be the whole of the wealth produced by labour ; but as land and capital are owned by men who are not labourers and, as labour cannot be performed without these, it follows that those

who own land and capital are the masters of those who toil. Thus capital, which was created by labour, has become the master of its creator."

That was a masterly economic statement, yet Hardie often said that Socialism is not merely a system of economics. He was a Socialist "because Socialism means fraternity founded on justice, and the fact that in order to secure this it is necessary to transfer land and capital from private to public ownership is a mere incident in the crusade." It was not by talking economics that the world would be made better.

"Unless we can inspire and enthuse with the higher ideal which underlies the Socialist movement, it will never touch the heart of humanity."

Again, he insisted that

"only by moral power can the necessary zeal and sacrifice be developed to carry this work through. I know of no great movement for the good of the race which has not been inspired by moral purpose."

He saw in Socialism, therefore, "not only a good system of political economy, but a philosophy of life altogether beautiful." He derided the belief that the best in life could be gained by "looking after number one."

“ From the legislator’s seat, the philosopher’s chair, the merchant’s stool and the parson’s desk come the same story – that self-interest is the propelling motive in life. Yet the fact remains that, when acting on his impulses and not from business motives, man finds his highest good to consist in seeking the welfare of others.”

He agreed with what Sergei Stepniak once said to him – that Socialism is akin to the religious movement at the time of the Reformation and “ the only force now able to inspire men with boundless devotion and utter disregard for personal safety.” Nothing that clashed with this aspect of Socialism would Hardie tolerate – or refrain from condemning. He could not, for instance, allow that Socialists might practise “ the demoralising doctrine of ‘ ca’ canny ’ ” (which taught wage-earners to do as little as possible for their pay, to slow up processes of work by strictly observing rules, and so on).

“ No man can act dishonestly without becoming dishonest. The tradesman who cheats his customers is cheating himself most ; the workman who robs his ‘ master ’ is robbing himself of that which even his ‘ master ’ could never take from him – his manhood. The man who is not true to the best in him is not true to himself. If Socialism be not truth, it will fail.”

He was equally bold in the application of his "beautiful" Socialist philosophy to the question whether Socialists should set their faces against drinking or not. He was opposed to the use of Labour clubs as boozing-kens ; he urged even that individuals should ask themselves whether their duty to the movement was compatible with personal indulgence in alcohol.

"To me the matter is one of serious moment. Each Socialist is by his creed under moral obligation to find his greatest pleasure in seeking the happiness and good of others. This is true of life at every point. The strong may not use their strength to the hurt of the weak. The man who can take a glass or let it alone is under moral obligation, for the sake of the weaker brother who cannot do so, to let it alone.

"I assisted at a function recently under the auspices of the I.L.P. which was conducted on temperance principles. A number of those present, however, came provided with supplies of liquor, whilst others found frequent occasion to visit a neighbouring pub.' Now here were a body of men who had set themselves the task of reforming the world and yet they could not meet in a social capacity for a few hours without the aid of liquor. It is not thus that great reforms are accomplished."

Some whose heads the cap fitted sneered at this as puritanism. It was not that ; it was a reasoned

objection to anything which, harmless in itself, might injure the cause. A number of delegates to a Trades Union Congress thought it compatible with their duty and dignity to accept Horatio Bottomley's hospitality. Hardie wrote sardonically :

" I am not very censorious in these matters, but were I a member of a union whose delegate attended this spread I would hesitate before again entrusting him with the honour of the union at future Congresses."

Bottomley did not forget or forgive easily. He waited for an opportunity to hit back and thought he had it when the *Labour Leader* called him ironically " a paragon of business purity and electoral probity." He wrote a threatening letter. Hardie civilly acknowledged it, and added this remark :

" It must be a source of the greatest satisfaction to a man that he has the verdicts of three juries to certify that he is not dishonest."

This sarcastic glance at his recent lawcourt adventures further infuriated Bottomley ; he declared that he would " expose the finance of the I.L.P." This was Hardie's rejoinder :

" I have your letter of the 4th instant and have nothing to add to mine of the 3rd, except to say that every political blackguard in England will follow with quite pathetic interest

your attack upon the finance of the I.L.P. and will pray for your success."

The matter ended there.

If Hardie had been taken into court, he would have had difficulty in getting justice, so strong was the prejudice against him. Dislike became venomous, rather than contemptuous, in 1894. He was still known as "the M.P. in the cloth cap." To the employing class he represented everything they most detested. He let no chance of exposing their methods go by. He could not be won over, as other worker-members had been. He did not want the hand of friendship from members of the employing class unless, like Dr. G. B. Clark, Cunninghame Graham, Sir Charles Dilke, they had renounced and rejected its methods and its aims. That class saw in him, therefore, an enemy more dangerous than any of the worker M.P.s had been so far. They were "true blue Englishmen," they "knew how to behave," they "played the game." If they attacked slum landlords, they did it respectfully, not like Hardie, who, in a speech about some such property belonging to Lord Salisbury (the famous one), said with heat: "I would not belong to a club which admitted his lordship," and meant it. To none of the "Lib-Labs" did it occur to protest against paying a Speaker of the House of Commons a pension of £4,000 a year, "when the House had neither the time nor the inclination to provide a system of pensions

for aged workers." In their eyes objection would have been "ungentlemanly." Hardie raised it; he moved to reduce the amount to £1,000. But no member could second his motion. His adversaries sneered in triumph.

For a time the mass of the nation watched his activity in Parliament with amusement and some admiration. This was changed into vehement hatred by his articles and speeches about the royal family.

It happened that the birth of an heir presumptive to the throne (eldest son of the Duke and Duchess of York, afterwards King George V and Queen Mary) coincided with a mining disaster which killed 200 men and boys in a Welsh pit. Just at the same time a French President (Carnot) was murdered. When Parliament was asked to express sympathy with the French nation, Keir Hardie enquired, amid growls of impatience and muttered abuse, whether sympathy with the relatives of the dead Welsh miners was to be moved by the Liberal Government. His suggestion was curtly brushed aside. Then he resolved to oppose the motion congratulating Queen Victoria on the birth of her great-grandson.

He wrote in the *Leader* a fierce diatribe against "the lickspittles of the press who have no ears for the cry of the *poor* widow and orphan and who attempt to see in the birth of a child to the Duke and Duchess of York an event of divine significance to the nation." He showed how "the

papers from which the working classes expect political light and guidance" gave far more space and prominence to the royal birth and the presidential taking-off than to the colliery disaster. "Offensively snobbish" he called this.

"Everyone would mourn with Madame Carnot and rejoice in a subdued kind of way with the Duke and Duchess in the birth of their child, but it is to the sore-stricken poor of that Welsh valley that the true hearts of this great nation will turn with over-welling sympathy."

In the House of Commons he found no true heart to support him when he urged that

"if the Government will not find an opportunity for a vote of condolence with the relatives of those who are lying stiff and stark in a Welsh valley, the motion before the House ought never to have been proposed either. If it be for rank and title only that time and occasion can be found in this House, then the sooner that truth is known outside the better."

Indignation led him into gibes against the royal family which served merely to enrage the bulk of his hearers. The scene became one of howling rowdyism. Hardie was yelled at, sworn at, roared at, but he stood firm and finished his speech. He had attempted to propose as an amendment that the House should condole with the friends of the dead miners' and condemn a

system which made the periodic sacrifice of lives inevitable. If this had not been ruled "out of order," it would probably have been passed and no disturbance would have occurred. Hardie's only mode of protest being to oppose the congratulatory motion, he had to challenge the will of an assembly in which he stood alone. From that time dated the virulent feeling against him which persisted among the greater part of the nation for the rest of his life.

To this feeling other causes contributed, but its chief nourishment was his realist attitude towards royalty, regarded at that time with so much favour by the mass of people – including, Hardie admitted, the working class, "because they did not know what it meant" – that even a hint of "disloyalty" could make it difficult for politicians to make themselves heard at public meetings.

Hardie's objection to monarchy was based, not on the shortcomings of those who represented it, but on the nature of the institution itself. He had not, it is true, a high opinion of its representatives. He saw in Queen Victoria "an old lady of very commonplace aspect," who was known and respected as "the pattern wife and mother, the embodiment of the virtues upon which the middle-class matron bases her claim to be considered the prop and mainstay of the race." He sympathised with her preference for life at Balmoral – "a quiet retreat, far removed from the turmoil and intrigue of

fashionable society, which had for her a charm few can appreciate." He believed her to be a peace-loving woman, and protested eloquently against her burial taking place "amid a barbarous display of the blood-thirsty implements of war." Since then the Queen's letters have shown that she was anything but a peace lover, and that no mother could be called "a pattern" who was so ill-advised in the bringing-up of her eldest son. But Keir Hardie accepted the opinion prevalent at the time.

For the Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward VII, he had no respect. "Sometimes we get glimpses of him at the gaming tables, sometimes on the race-course." He "drew £60,000 a year from the Duchy of Cornwall property in London, made up of the vilest slums." Of King George he wrote at the time of the Coronation that "no attribute of greatness was discernible in him." Hardie might have been thrilled to "loyalty" by a Maria Theresa or even a Prince Charlie – if he never saw them! (He wrote once that royalty to be a success should keep off the streets!) His rich nature demanded heroes. He made one of Robert Burns, he made one of Parnell. But in the occupant of Buckingham Palace he could see "nothing to inspire."

It was Hardie's logical mind, however, rather than any personal antipathy to individuals, which set him against what he called "the worship of an empty form, the pretence that a gilded mediocrity is indispensable to the well-being

of the nation." He was revolted by the ease with which "even under a representative system it is possible to paralyse a nation by maintaining the fiction that a reigning family is a necessity of good government." That keeping up the fiction of a personal ruler might be a convenience he would not admit.

"Either the British people are fit to govern themselves or they are not. If they are, an hereditary ruler is an insult ; if they are not, they should not be entrusted with votes. Despotism and monarchy are compatible ; democracy and monarchy are an unthinkable connection. No healthy well-developed people could tolerate an institution which belongs to the childhood of the race and which in these latter days is the centre, if not the source, of the corrupting influences which constitute Society."

The throne, he saw, represents the power of caste, of class rule. Round it gather parasites and toadies who are dangers to the community. "The desire to enter the sacred precincts is the full fruition of the gospel of getting on, and getting on means rising on the ruins of our fellows." Furthermore the cost of the royal family was in his opinion far too high.

"It would be an abuse of language to say that the sum we pay the King is a moderate sum to pay for the duties he performs when the nation is entering upon a period of trade
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depression and when hundreds of thousands of His Majesty's subjects – the life of every one of whom is as valuable as that of the King – are living not only on the verge of poverty, but actually in poverty itself. It is an outrage upon all our forms of government to propose a sum of this kind for the maintenance of the head of the State."

When he divided the House of Commons on the proposal, four only of the working-class members voted with him against it. He was supported also by fifty-four Irish members.

Hardie was not an active republican. It did not seem to him worth while exchanging a monarch for a president. "The robbery of the poor would go on equally under the one as the other." Not until the system of wealth-production was changed and the exploiting of the people ended would thrones and presidential chairs cease to be "used by the plunderers of labour with philosophic impartiality to bolster up private property."

Yet, while he did not urge the immediate abolition of monarchy, he considered it necessary to keep a sharp eye on the actions of the monarch. He protested so forcibly against King Edward's visit to the Tsar (1908), and with so copious a record of Tsarist "atrocities," that he was threatened with suspension in the House of Commons, and was (with two other M.P.s) struck off the list of persons invited to royal

garden-parties. As he had not accepted invitations when he received them, this would not have deprived him of any personal enjoyment. But he saw that the King had blundered ; had (in the words of his biographer, Sir Sidney Lee) " invited public suspicion of misinterpreting his constitutional position." Hardie protested against social pressure being used to influence political action. The Labour Party asked that the names of all its members should be crossed off the Palace lists. The King had to give way.

Hardly less noticeable than his " disloyalty " as an ingredient in the hostile feeling he aroused was Hardie's persistence in pleading the cause of the unemployed. The public had not then accustomed itself, as it did later, to the idea that there must always be (except in war-time) a very large number of idle hands in the community — not idle from choice, but because no man hires them. The necessity to Capitalism of a reservoir of unemployed workers was still understood by very few. Asquith's admission of this necessity was still far in the future. Even in 1903 Sir John Gorst, whose Conservatism was now and then riven asunder by his native independence of thought, brought down reproof on himself for unwisdom in stating that " the disorder was chronic." To call attention to the existence of hundreds of thousands of workers who sought work in vain was considered unnecessary, subversive, unpatriotic. As for the remedies which Keir Hardie suggested, they were

either laughed at or denounced as revolutionary. He was a man "bent on making himself a nuisance."

His first speech in Parliament was on this theme. In 1893 there were 1,300,000 trade unionists receiving out-of-work pay. Nevertheless it seemed to almost all of Hardie's fellow-M.P.s, and to the mass of the nation, unreasonable and even unpatriotic to declare, as he did, that poverty and unemployment were matters of national concern more important than Church Dis-establishment or parish councils. He merely caused annoyance when he complained that the Liberal plans, announced in the Speech from the Throne, "left out 4,000,000 people who had no visible means of sustenance as if they did not exist." What could Parliament do? Liberals asked irritably.

Yet Hardie's effort was not wasted. His demand for "prompt and effective legislation" was supported by Tories for purely Party purposes and defeated by Liberals. Here was confirmation of what he continually asserted - that there was need for a Parliamentary Labour force which should stand alone, independent of Liberalism. Frequently he forced Liberals to vote down proposals for the workers' benefit; frequently, too, he made Tories and Liberals act together in the interest of capitalism (as when he claimed for the workless "the right to work" and brought in a Bill for the Nationalisation of Mines). Either way he could claim support for

his contention that Labour must have its own Party.

He was active outside Parliament as well. He took the lead in attacking Asquith, Liberal Home Secretary, after miners had been fired on and killed by troops during a strike riot at Fetherstone in Yorkshire. Ministers were obliged to appoint a committee of enquiry, which of course whitewashed everybody. That soldiers should be employed in this way filled him with horror. Writing of a visit to a miners' strike area in Wales, into which troops had been sent, he said he had learned that some of them were natives of the district, themselves colliers. "Their fathers and brothers are on strike and they have been brought down to shoot them. Surely there is a text here for the clergy next Sunday."

With the aid of the I.L.P., rapidly growing during its earliest years, Hardie played the agitator throughout the industrial parts of the country. It was wearying to travel as he did. "A fine meeting at Dudley, but two days in the train was a big price to pay for it." His journalism suffered. "He who stumps the country from Norfolk to Forfarshire on a talking expedition cannot at the same time write readable copy." He did not know he was wearing himself out, but, if he had known, the knowledge would have made no difference. He was borne up by the welcome given to his ideas, by the progress of his efforts to organise the unemployed. He did this with so much success that when, in

1895, he again put to the House of Commons the motion rejected in 1893, the Liberal Government was afraid to oppose it unconditionally. They offered to appoint a committee. Hardie shrugged his shoulders. He had no belief in this familiar dodge, but he extorted as the price of withdrawing his motion a promise that a report should be made as quickly as possible. Before the promise could be redeemed the Liberal Government had been turned out. Their defeat in the General Election of 1895 they attributed partly to Keir Hardie's attacks on their Party, but their downfall involved him in it. He was now to be out of Parliament for five years.

Before that period had passed came the South African War ; this filled still fuller the cup of the national hatred against Keir Hardie. Against the enthusiasm of the ignorant and unthinking he tried to gain a hearing for what is now admitted to be the truth.

“The war is a capitalist war. The British Merchant hopes to secure markets for his goods, the investor an outlet for his capital, the speculator more fools out of whom to make money, and the mining companies cheaper labour and increased dividends. We are told it is to spread freedom and to extend the rights and liberties of the common people. When we find a Conservative Government expending the blood and treasure of the nation to extend the rights and liberties of the common people, we may well pause and begin to think.”

Imperialism he correctly defined as "appealing to the vanity of weak minds." If patriotism was the love of one's own country, imperialism might be defined as "love of other people's countries." With it went always militarism ; that meant war, and, whoever gained by war, the working class was bound to lose. War not only distracted attention from social reform, but destroyed the desire for it by changing the current of men's thoughts. The voice of reason was always drowned in the clamour of war.

This application of cold, hard common sense to the fevered minds of "a poor bewildered people duped into believing there was a real cause for war" caused fury to break out wherever Hardie appeared in public. He was not surprised ; he was not intimidated. He knew by now the nature of the mob.

"When the business patriots, to whom war means money, cheer, the British working man cheers also : as they vote, he votes : the opinions of their newspapers are his opinions. Labour has no interest of its own, no opinion of its own, no voice of its own. The working man is a negligible quantity ; he is content to be flattered and cajoled."

A Liberal peer-politician said, "We must all stop thinking till the war is over." Keir Hardie was unpopular because he would not, could not, stop thinking. He thought the harder. Everyone can now see he came to sound conclusions.

But at the time he was hooted, hissed, menaced with violence, denounced as a traitor, regarded even by the mass of the workers as a disgrace to his country.

From this period dated also Hardie's interest in India, which later added inflammation to the prejudice against him. An I.L.P. resolution of sorrow at an Indian famine, the result of "heavy taxation, expropriation of the people's slender resources, and capitalistic occupation," brought invitations to Hardie to visit the country. He was not able to do that for a number of years, but he made himself acquainted with the problems set by the growing dislike of British rule. When he did go to study them on the spot, a campaign of abuse and calumny was carried on in London newspapers, although neither the authorities nor the Press in India made complaint of his speeches. For a week or two a frenzy of resentment raged against him, then died away as the truth became known. The episode had merely the effect of making him better known, drawing attention to his statements, and increasing the affectionate respect of his fellow Socialists everywhere.

Even in South Africa, which he visited, after he had been in India, in the course of his world-tour, there were plenty of devoted, brave admirers ready to defend him against the mobs egged on by the mine-owners' Press to attack him. The mine-owners still feared him. He had helped to check their use of cheap Chinese labour. He

was urging the unions to admit Africans, who would then claim the same pay as Europeans, and the competition of underpaid black labour against white labour would end. The white workers foolishly allowed themselves to be incited to violent protest. Mobs waited wherever he went to threaten and even stone him. Yet there were always courageous men on his side.

One other general reason for the ease with which hatred could be stirred up against him among the unreflecting mass lay in the irrefutable logic of his approach to all problems. He had, as we have seen, no use for theories, no inclination to philosophise. He was moved more often by his emotions than by any abstract reasoning. Yet, once he had begun to think, his intellect created an unbreakable chain of argument. He passed quickly from premises to conclusions, expecting others to follow him with the same speed. That is a method which irritates English minds. They are not used to admitting that, because an institution is out of date, or a social evil damaging, the one should be abolished, the other cured by unfamiliar remedies. The English must be introduced to new ideas gradually, with careful avoidance of shock, as horses are walked round automobiles until, having become accustomed to the noise, appearance, and smell, they can pass them without alarm. Among the causes of Keir Hardie's unpopularity must be recorded his disregard of the irritation produced among the English by logical thinking.

CHAPTER IV

WEARING HIMSELF OUT

“Hardly in modern times has a man arisen from the people who, unattracted by the enticements of wealth and pleasure, and unbent either by praise or abuse, has remained so faithful to the class to which he belongs.”

Bruce Glasier at I.L.P. 8th Annual Conference.

WHEN, in 1900, he was sent for the second time to the House of Commons, Keir Hardie's position was far stronger than it had been in 1892. He had established a tradition of leadership. He was known throughout the country. “By day and night,” as was said of him by the comrade quoted above, “often weary and often wet, he had trudged from town to city in every corner of the land.” So famous had he become that he was pressed to be a candidate for election in two constituencies. In those days the voters did not all poll on the same day. He was beaten at Preston (Lancashire) ; he was victorious at Merthyr in Wales after spending only twenty-four hours in the district and speaking at no more than three meetings.

The I.L.P. had been through a lean period : it was forced to fight for existence : it had won. Slowly it was pounding the idea of Socialism into British heads, making here and there enthusiastic converts, forcing the nation to understand that politics could no longer be the familiar sham fight between the two old Parties committed to Capitalism, but a real struggle between the

Haves and the Have-nots. On two sorts of working-class people it made no impression. Hardie described them angrily :

“ There is the smug, selfish man who finds himself fairly comfortable and desires to make his position secure. To him the defender of property can always appeal, certain of a willing response. The poor dolt, blinded by selfishness, *will* not see that the everlengthening chain of poverty to which he is attached by the mere fact of belonging to the working classes will one day drag him over into the abyss.

“ Then there is the ignorant, besotted set who vote Tory because of a strange vein of contrariness which runs through human nature. They have no property to conserve, no empire to defend, but neither have they any of the grit of true manhood, and they find a serf's pleasure in being on the same side as their masters.

“ These, when combined, are but a small portion of the electorate, but at present they are sufficient to turn the scale heavily in favour of Toryism.” •

The first of these types prevailed among the better-paid, highly skilled trade unionists ; the second, among the unskilled, at that time poorly organised. Yet, in spite of their recalcitrance, the idea became more and more familiar that Labour should not say, “ by your leave,” to any Party ; that there should be no more cringing

and fawning upon rich men ; no hampering paralysing alliances ; no half-hearted adherence to principle.

“ Simply a straightforward, honest, dignified movement, self-supporting and self-contained, marching forward irresistibly to a self-assured triumph.”

More familiar, too, the proposition that the means of producing the necessities of life – food, clothing, dwellings – should be owned by the community and be used to produce for service, not for profit. Municipal Socialism had widely spread. Property valued at £500,000,000 had passed from private to public ownership. Thus Socialism was not the word of fear it had been in the Labour Movement eight years earlier.

A Socialist had been president of the Trades Union Congress (O’Grady, afterwards Sir James). Another had been elected secretary of the Engineers’ Union (George N. Barnes, afterwards Right Honourable). Most encouraging sign of all to Keir Hardie was the setting-up of the Labour Representation Committee for which he had clamoured so long. Before many years passed this was to develop into the Labour Party.

At its birth there occurred a difficulty which might have killed it. Hardie’s intervention to avert this risk showed both the power and the wisdom of the infant’s begetter. A squabble arose as to whether Independent Labour candidates for seats in Parliament should be required

to profess Socialism ; or whether a small number of measures should be adopted as a programme, freedom to vote and speak outside of these being left open. The latter was the trade unionist plan ; the other proposal was made by H. M. Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation, with the aim, it is not ungenerous to suppose, of forcing the hand of Keir Hardie, whom they accused of not being Socialist enough.

He knew very well that to antagonise the trade unions would be disastrous. He saw very clearly that the immediate work in hand was to make a Labour Party possible. To let either motion be passed would cause a split in the ranks which it was essential to keep intact. So he jumped into the gap between them, asking for a decision in favour of a distinct and separate Labour group in Parliament ready to work with any Party for legislation in the interest of Labour or for the defeat of legislation which threatened that interest. This satisfied the trade unionists, who probably did not grasp what it meant : the action of Labour members would depend, not on their individual choice, but on the resolutions of the group. It was enough also for all Socialists of practical intelligence, who were confident that Labour Members would work for Socialism in Parliament when once they got there. To get them there was the first task. Keir Hardie's suggestion aimed at, and, in time, accomplished, this.

He himself held that the year 1902, when a by-election was fought at Wakefield in Yorkshire,

marked the birth of the Labour Party. Until then it had been only a name. "Now," said Hardie, "we have a youngster alive and kicking in the cradle." It was a fight between Tory and Independent Labour candidates. No Liberal stood. Therefore, Hardie argued, the Liberal trade unionists had to vote for the I.L.P. man against the Tory, and next time, with a Liberal in the field, "they would have to do the same or explain why." They had managed at last, in one constituency, to put all the workers behind a Labour man. He was beaten, but that was unimportant. What mattered was the beginning of a united workers' front.

For the moment, however, Hardie still formed in the House of Commons a Party of one. Within a few years he would there be leader of a Labour Party numbering twenty-nine. As yet he stood out, the herald of that Party, unaided and alone at Westminster. In this period he did his best work. He was always in his place; frequently rising to put questions; not speaking often, but being listened to with attention whenever he did. The speech in which he recommended to the House a resolution in favour of Socialism was heard with especial interest. It was the first of its kind. It asked an overwhelming capitalist assembly to recognise:

"The increased burden which private ownership of land and capital imposed upon the industrial and useful classes;

“The poverty, destitution, and general moral and physical deterioration resulting from a competitive system of wealth production which aims primarily at profit-making ;

“The alarming growth of trusts and syndicates able by reason of their great wealth to influence Governments and plunge peaceful nations into war to serve their interests ;

“The menace to the well-being of the realm caused by this condition of affairs and the need for legislation designed to inaugurate a Socialist Commonwealth founded upon the common ownership of land and capital, production for use not for profit, and equality of opportunity for every citizen.”

It was, Hardie knew, as little use asking the House of Commons to assent to this as it had been to invite royalty to abolish itself (a proposal he once gravely tried to put on the Order Paper, only to have it gravely ruled out by Mr. Speaker, who must have shared Hardie's amusement at the joke). But the forms of the House provided no other method by which the subject of Socialism could be introduced. Indeed, they very nearly deprived him of this chance. In the Private Member's ballot for the opportunity to raise discussions he gained a place for April 23rd, 1901, an historic date. But his was the last place : not until after half past eleven at night was he called on to speak. The House was to rise at twelve ; he had no more than twenty-five minutes. Friends

and enemies agreed that he made excellent use of them.

He spoke, as usual, with quiet emphasis. He reasoned his points. They were points unfamiliar to most of his hearers ; he made them as simple as he could. He admitted that so long as producers competed with each other, conditions for workers and consumers might be just bearable, but that large combinations of employers, caring only for dividends, made them unbearable. The time was coming, he said, when the nation would have to choose between an uncontrolled monopoly conducted for the benefit of shareholders and a monopoly owned and controlled by the State in the interest of the population as a whole. This would be, in effect, deciding the question propounded in the Sermon on the Mount, whether we would worship God or Mammon.

“ The present is a Mammon-worshipping age. Socialism proposes to dethrone the brute god and to lift humanity into its place.”

He ended with the prediction that “ just as surely as Radicalism democratised the British system of government politically in the 19th century, so would Socialism democratise the country industrially during the 20th.”

There was unluckily no time for debate. The House of Commons did not think it worth while to make opportunity for the discussion of a subject which within a generation was to divide the world into two hostile camps, to make all other

subjects appear trifling, to turn the thoughts of all men towards the dilemma which Keir Hardie described.

However, he had done what he wanted to do. He had brought it to the notice of the nation. His speech was widely reported and commented on. It certainly raised him in the estimation both of his fellow-M.P.s and of the community at large. It was not oratory. Oratory would not have impressed the House : would have emptied it. Hardie was heard with respect because he gave an admirably succinct and memorable statement of opinions sincerely held. He once told an American audience : " Those who know me best are aware that I am not much of an orator." Cunninghame Graham thus described his manner of addressing meetings before he entered Parliament :

" His voice was high-pitched, but sonorous and very far-carrying. He never used notes and, I think, never prepared a speech, leaving all to the inspiration of the moment. This suited his natural unforced method of speaking admirably. . . . His chief merits were his homeliness, directness and sincerity."

He was always a man speaking his mind ; he never talked for talking's sake. Even at thirty-three he found it hard to quarry the words that would express his meaning. At no period was he glib. At that stage he stood with heels together,

never shifting his position, using no gestures, faltering now and then as if he might break down. He drew his utterance from the depths of his being. This sometimes lifted his simple eloquence to heights of passion and power ; at other times he dropped to flatness. He confessed that sometimes " the flow of ideas and words ceases and I begin to flounder." A leading British newspaper described him after he had been some time in Parliament as " one of its most cultured speakers, his phraseology smooth, dispassionate, faultlessly fashioned, his style and diction such as to put the bulk of our legislators to shame."¹ Yet he did not speak easily. He said he envied speakers who had " unlimited confidence in their own powers," but he said that ironically. He did, in truth, believe self-confidence to be a danger. Speakers who " apparently gave not one moment's previous thought to what they were going to say," and who " rambled on in haphazard fashion, saying the same things and using the same illustrations as were common ten or a dozen years ago," did the movement little good, he lamented. All who were " called upon to bear testimony for the truth as it is in Socialism should do so with a fitting sense of the responsibility they had undertaken."

He felt that responsibility so much that he

" usually began a speech literally in fear and trembling. . . . A wave of cold feeling works its way down from the brain to my toe-nails, often

¹ The *Leeds Mercury*.

producing a shiver as if I had struck a chill. At the same time, away somewhere in the inner recesses of my sub-conscious being, I am not a man, but a little tiny speck of green protoplasm floating on the surface of a stagnant pool, a leaf tossing in the whirls and eddies of a mountain brook, a shell half embedded in the sand and washed by the lapping waves of a troubled sea under a grey sky or – I hate this worst of any – I am a mere pigmy surrounded by a circle of big brawny giants each armed with a club. Whatever form the feeling takes, it always produces a sense of my own insignificance.”

As he spoke, he ceased, if his hearers were indulgent, to be a separate person. “I absorb and am absorbed by my audience. In spirit we seem to melt and fuse into one, and I am not speaking to them, but through them, and my thoughts are not my own, but are their thoughts, and we are on the most confidential and comfortable terms one with the other.”

This did not always happen. Though he found, as a rule, gatherings eager to hear him, he sometimes faced hostility and even rancour. He was quick at answering interrupters. He had a dry way of shutting them up, as he shut up the sabbatarian who asked him if he considered music on Sunday to be sacrilege. “Aye,” he said, “I will agree with our friend there if he can tell me the difference between a sacred and a secular *do*.”

He had in 1901 the first warning that he was wearing his strength down. Although the I.L.P. had voted him £150 a year for his Parliamentary expenses, he still did the work of several men. He was now something of an oracle in the Labour Movement; he had to expend much time with those who sought his counsel. His mail was large and he dealt with it all himself, not being able to pay a secretary. He could have had money from many sources. Andrew Carnegie offered him an income. Two old sisters in Edinburgh, after making enquiries about his moral character, including a call on his mother-in-law to ask if he treated his wife well, proposed to pay him £300 a year (the same sum the Liberals offered him), and to arrange for its continuance after their death.

“To a man without a shilling and the prospect of having to earn his living somehow, the offer had its practical advantages, and I promised to think it over.”

But he quickly declined it, with the suggestion that it might be passed on to a Labour organisation (which was not at all well received). As examples of the opportunities thrown in his way to make money he used to tell with a frown of the Ulster man who wanted to give him a bag of five hundred sovereigns for a vote against the Irish Home Rule Bill, and with a smile of the proposal made by the Mayor of San Francisco (while he was on a visit to the United States)

that if the I.L.P. or Keir Hardie himself would declare in favour of Bi-metallism, on which W. J. Bryan was then campaigning for the U.S. Presidency, a cheque for \$100,000 (£20,000) would be handed to him. The Mayor's genuine surprise when this was laughed at seemed to Hardie to throw light upon American politicians.

While many Labour leaders were living very comfortably, Hardie never had more than enough to supply his own and his family's needs. Twenty-five shillings was as much as he could send his wife each week, often it was only a pound. He lived, while he had to be in London, in a narrow court near Fleet Street. He found there an old house of dignity due to sound design. One large panelled room in it, divided into three by partitions and curtains, gave him living and sleeping quarters and a minute kitchen, where he cooked his own meals. There was a pleasant air about these cheap lodgings, conferred on them by their occupant's refinement and studious nature. The house had a tiny garden, where he coaxed a few flowers to bloom in spite of the City's smoke and grime. The furniture in his rooms was plain, but solid. He kept a Union Jack draped about a floor-lamp, and had to explain to puzzled visitors that it was captured from South African jingoes at a political meeting ! He was at his best when he sat by the fire smoking and letting his agile mind play over many themes. He liked candles better than a lamp to read or write by. That suited the old-world atmosphere of the place.

At all times he lived very simply, not only from necessity, but by choice. In a town where he stayed during an election, and where he was reported to have indulged in ten-course dinners followed by champagne suppers, he stayed at "the cheapest hotel available," and, because it did not supply dinner for less than two shillings or tea for less than one, he went out to a shop "where the prices were about one-half of the above." When he had supper at the hotel, "it consisted of bread and cheese and if the night was specially cold and the drive from the meeting had been specially long, a cup of coffee might be added. The suppers cost sixpence."

Many speakers in request at Labour meetings made what they could out of their engagements – never very much. Hardie asked nothing either for services or expenses if he spoke in London or Glasgow, while he was living in those cities. For other meetings he "endeavoured, not with much success, to clear my out-of-pocket expenses."

"Train fares and travel mean money. So does postage. So does the loss of time involved in connection with the work which, in the case of a man who earns his living by his pen as I do, comes to a serious item. . . . I found that a fixed uniform charge of three guineas for meetings in the provinces enabled me to meet all expenses."

Often it did not. Yet he preferred to be a loser rather than ask people as poor as himself

to make up the deficit. The years that followed his return to the House of Commons were especially full and trying. The frequency of Labour wars which meant cruelly hard times for so many thousands, and the increase of unemployment (which he predicted long before), made him anxious to intensify his efforts ; made him bitter too ; told on his nervous energy. He wrote fiercely, one Christmas, that

“ the thoughts and feelings which pertain to the Christmas season are far from me. When I think of the thousands who will take the Christ name in vain and not see His image being crucified afresh in each hungry child, I cannot think of peace. . . . A holocaust of every Church building in Christendom to-night would be an act of sweet savour in the sight of Him whose name is supposed to be worshipped within their walls. If the spiritually proud and pride-blinded professors of Christianity could only be made to feel and see that the Christ is here ever present with us, and that they are laying on the stripes and binding the brow afresh with thorns and making shed tears of blood in a million homes, surely the world could be made more sweet for the establishment of His Kingdom. We have no right to a merry Christmas which so many of our fellows cannot share.”

Another Christmas found him tortured by the thought of “ big, strong, able-bodied, skilful men suffering all the torments of the fabled hell

of the theologians because they cannot find a master to hire them." He had tried to raise debate on Unemployment in the House of Commons. He submitted a resolution calling for legal enforcement of a minimum wage, particularly for those receiving less than 30s. a week ; of a forty-eight-hour week ; and of work for the workless provided by local authorities, agricultural or industrial – "suitable and remunerative work which shall not involve disfranchisement or any other political disability." So little support was offered that Balfour, then Prime Minister, doubted in languid tone "whether there was any exceptional distress due to want of work," and the Speaker refused to allow discussion of Hardie's proposals. He wrote to *The Times*, however, proving that Balfour cheerfully disregarded the facts. There were at the least half a million unemployed. He begged the Government for a grant of £100,000 as a beginning. To this no reply was given. Nevertheless his untiring exposure of the cancer in industry and the hardships it caused could not be totally ignored. Early in 1903 a Conference, at the Guildhall in London, discussed the problem. Though little came of it in the way of Government action, public feeling and anxiety were stirred in a manner which three years later was to make itself felt, among other discontents, at the polls.

Hardie could not understand how the ruling classes could be so callous. He grew more savage against them for "professing a religion

they did not believe." Especially against the Churches did his anger burn hotly.

"They have never originated any great movement. Whether it be the abolition of slavery, the abolition of the drink traffic, the abolition of child labour ; no matter what the question, the pulpit has always kept aloof until some mere worldling has educated the public and made the new cause safe, profitable and respectable. There have been splendid exceptions, but these only serve to bring the fact as here stated into more general prominence. That the masses will in time be quickened into a healthy spirit of activity I have no doubt ; but, when that time comes, it will be the work of the Socialists, not of the clergy, which will have brought it about. One good active branch of the Independent Labour Party will do more to rouse the people of a neighbourhood from their apathy than all the churches and chapels therein put together."

Hardie's indictment was not that of a materialist against the things of the spirit. Of an intensely spiritual temperament himself, he was infuriated by the materialism of religious institutions. The sense he had of "a Power behind nature, unseen but felt," and of "a something beyond death" which would redeem life from being "a mere wastage," could not be disconnected in his mind from his duty to his fellow-men. He did not see in Jesus the founder of an

institution leagued with principalities and powers, exercising dominion over intellects and souls. Jesus was to him the enemy of all formal "established" Churches, their victim as well. "I understand what Christ suffered in Gethsemane," he said, after he had been hooted and mobbed in Wales during the Great War. No sympathy with the spiritual side of religion could have been stronger than his : he was a living embodiment of it. Often people slightly acquainted with him were astonished by such an incident as occurred one evening in Norwich. With a few companions he had strayed from a Labour conference into the cathedral precincts. They walked round the old walls, saw the sun set and dusk settle over them, then heard singing from within, and knew that the evening service was going on. Suddenly Hardie's voice was heard joining in the 23rd Psalm (The Lord is my Shepherd), and all sang with him.

There was religion as a living reality – the reality of a mystic, be it understood. Hardie made no attempt to define God. What "the Lord" actually stood for in his imagination was the Good Spirit of primitive races. "If there is one matter upon which the teaching of Christ is clear it is that there is one universal Father and that all men are brethren." Convinced of this, he could not but act upon it : such was the stark honesty of his nature. All who professed to believe it and acted otherwise were scribes and pharisees, hypocrites. For example :

“ Christ taught that riches were a positive curse. Did employers of labour and owners of property think they would find mansions in heaven for a few favoured angels, and slums and hovels for the great mass of their fellows? Did they think they would be able to compel their fellow-angels to pay rent for the right to rest their weary wings on the banks of the river Jordan? Did they think that there were going to be iron and coal masters revelling in luxury and oppressing the millions whose toil made the luxury possible?

“ If they thought those things would not be in heaven, by what right did they continue them on earth? British Cabinet Ministers, except Lord Morley, would say they believed in Christ. Yet there were districts in London, and elsewhere, where mothers sat weeping over children who were crying for food. In the public schools they would see the little toddling things in ragged clothing, boots full of holes, bellies without food, with drawn pinched faces and wide-open staring eyes. The statesmen who had the power to cure that kind of thing and did not were insulting Christ by professing to be His followers.”

He went to see a play about the persecuted early Christians. He saw on the stage, he said,

“ the ‘ Christian ministers ’ at the beginning – poor men, haggard, ill-fed, impetuous, enthusiastic, trudging from village to village

and city to city, carrying the 'glad tidings,' shut up in prisons, murdered, torn to pieces by wild beasts. The 'Christian ministers' of to-day, close shaven, well fed, sleek, æsthetic, dressed in broad cloth, unemotional, thank God their lives have been cast in more pleasant places. Does not the contrast painfully reveal what is going on? Christianity is no longer a reality. The religious form may still exist, but the spirit has passed away and found its embodiment elsewhere."

Nothing angered him more than the admonition to the oppressed to bear their ills patiently because they would be compensated for them in heaven and because others who seemed better off were really less so. During a Trades Union Congress at Bradford in Yorkshire he went, one Sunday evening, into a large well-furnished Methodist chapel. The minister, in his sermon, said that it was a mistake for the poor to grumble at their misery; all the real misery was among the rich. As he left the chapel, Hardie saw two people distributing handbills about a Socialist meeting. He worked off his annoyance with what he had heard from the pulpit by taking a handful of the leaflets and busily giving them away. Some of his trade union colleagues, who had enjoyed the sermon, censured him severely.

True religion, of no matter what variety, Hardie respected, as he respected character in opponents. Falsity and sanctimoniousness he

hated, plainly avowing his hatred. His campaign against Lord Overtoun, a harsh, conscienceless manufacturer of chemicals, was the more vigorous and pitiless by reason of this Liberal peer's pretence of Christianity.

"No movement in religious, social or advanced political circles in the West of Scotland is deemed complete without his presence and patronage. . . . Scarce a day passes on which his Lordship is not found presiding or taking part in some gathering connected with a work of mercy, or leading some deputation in the interests of morality, or aiding to promote some measure of working-class reform."

Lord Overtoun supported foreign missions ; he paid a "Bible-woman" to attend to his workers' souls ; he endowed a popular preacher with £1,000 a year. In his chemical factory men were paid threepence and fourpence an hour. For their wages of 21s. or 28s. a week they worked twelve hours a day, with no regular meal hours, and seven days a week. Any man staying away from work on Sunday was docked of his Monday's wage also. Yet Lord Overtoun had taken leading part in preventing street cars from being run on Sundays by the Glasgow Corporation, and in other Lord's Day Rest activities.

The chemical work was bad for health, and nothing was done to save the men from its effects.

"Vapours and fumes eat away the cartilage of the nose, and poison the blood, so that the

stomach in time will only retain certain kinds of food and an intense desire for stimulants is generated. A dry dust floats in the atmosphere which gets into the throat and produces an arid, burning feeling."

Relentlessly Hardie hurled passages from the New Testament at Lord Overtoun ; told him that Christ, were He with us, would denounce him as he denounced the "Whited Sepulchres" of His own day.

"I believe in Christ's gospel of love and brotherhood and service. I know that Lord Overtoun is of the same hard, self-righteous type as the pharisees of old were, and I know that his profession and practice, differing so widely as they do, are a stumbling-block to many, especially to young men. I am not attacking religion, but I mean to try whether the conscience of the Christian Church cannot be so stirred on this matter as to insist on men who make so much profession of Christianity as Lord Overtoun makes, giving first of all some evidence of the faith that is in them by their treatment of their workpeople. If they will not treat these humanely, then the Church should not accept for its altar the blood-stained gifts which have been procured by the destruction of men, body and soul."

The Glasgow clergy of all varieties were silent,

“Servility, hypocrisy, mammon worship, the cult of respectability and the fear of the truth have eaten like canker worms the marrow from their bones until they have become the mere outward appearances of men.”

He was asked to remain silent concerning a great wrong, Keir Hardie said, since if it were made public, it might damage Christianity. “As if God could be hoodwinked, as if Christ would bless an effort founded on a lie !”

The campaign succeeded. Conditions at the chemical works were changed, very much for the better.

That encouraged the campaigner, but often he was cast down by the slowness of his efforts to mature and the seemingly invincible ignorance to which that slowness was due. He would not entertain the thought that “a violent outbreak” might be necessary. Socialism was revolutionary, but the changes it would make could not, Hardie argued, be brought about by force. They must have public opinion behind them, winning one reform after another, and finally breaking down the walls even of self-interest. He had little patience with violent revolutionaries in silk hats, like Hyndman. He never lost his faith in constitutional methods, though at times, as in the early years of the century, it was sorely tested. This reacted badly on his physical state.

As his health grew worse, he was freed, fortunately, from the anxiety of keeping the *Labour*

CHAPTER V

VICTORY — AND DEFEAT

“Keir Hardie is the only man who could have created the Labour Party. . . . He is almost the only man in that Party who is not fitted to lead it.”

A. G. Gardiner, in “Prophets, Priests, and Kings.”

Not many men see their life's work accomplished by the time they reach fifty. That Hardie was able by the efforts of a quarter of a century to create a new political Party — and this in a land so suspicious of newness as Britain — proved not only his power, but the ripeness of the time for such creation.

It is the coming together of a man and an opportunity that make changes. Often the opportunity is lost because no man appears to seize it. Only by a leader of Keir Hardie's self-less devotion, clear-eyed certainty and fierce vigour could the task of creating a Labour Party have been carried through.

All the Trade Union M.P.s, almost everyone who could be called a Labour leader, were attached to the Liberals, were unwilling to leave them. Even in 1906 the Miners' Federation still stood aloof from the Labour Representation Committee. Long after Hardie had formed the I.L.P., and injected his idea into many trade union officials, there was a tendency among candidates for Parliament to represent themselves as moderate men, to declare that the changes they

sought would not really make very much difference.

Hardie both despised and feared this poverty of spirit. Just before the 1906 elections (after the collapse of the Tory Government which he had done so much to discredit — more than any other individual M.P.) he warned such candidates that trying to win over the cautious and the timid by these tactics was a very dangerous game to play.

“Once a man begins to play fast-and-loose with his principles, he gets on a slippery step, at the bottom of which is the slough of time-serving expediency. ‘Easy the descent into Hades’ is a saying of which many a good man and woman has lived to experience the bitter meaning. What shall it profit a man though he gains a seat in Parliament and lose his own self-respect?”

Never forget, he urged, that we are pioneers : never sink to the level of vote-hunters, popularity-seekers. If the twenty-eight Labour members who entered the new Parliament with him had been, indeed, pioneers, had they despised popularity as he did, their achievement would have been historic. In fact, they were almost all of the vote-hunting, office-seeking type, though not quite so openly and stolidly as the twenty others described as “Labour members,” who were in reality Liberals, scarcely Radicals even. The twenty-eight called themselves Socialists — most of them “with very little understanding,” Hardie

once commented, "of what they mean by the label." Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden and J. H. Thomas were to prove later how right he was, even about men who figured then as pundits of the Socialist creed.

Hardie, however, was full of hope. At fifty he felt younger in spirit, he declared, than he ever remembered to have been before. His head, always fine, had become magnificent in its calm beauty and nobility. Hair and beard were almost white. His eyes lit up often, when he was moved to tenderness, amusement, or wrath, but they did not seem young eyes. They had looked on too much of the world's sorrow for that.

His new Party filled him with a deep satisfaction. He remembered that Parnell had a far smaller following when he began in the House of Commons his struggle for Irish self-government. What might not a Party of twenty-nine do, if they were bold and resolute? Unfortunately these were exactly the qualities which the twenty-eight conspicuously lacked. "It was a by-word," Hardie declared angrily, "that MacDonald was always on the doorsteps of Cabinet Ministers." Very few of his colleagues showed the fearlessness he had hoped for.

Once only since Parnell has the House of Commons been made to feel that it contained a band of stalwarts who knew what they wanted and would stick at nothing to secure it. That was when the Glasgow group made its appearance in 1922. Had there then been leadership

equal to the spirit of the rank and file, the history of the years that followed might have been altogether different. Had there been in 1906 a rank and file as determined and as courageous and as strong on first principles as their leader, the events of a generation might be less deplorable to look back on. But with Hardie a sick man, and most of his lieutenants more anxious to stand well in the opinion of opponents than to do their best for supporters, the new Labour Party missed the tide.

As its elected chairman, Keir Hardie set forth what he held to be its mission. They must, he told his followers, "infuse a spirit of healthy seriousness into the political life and thought of our time." Most necessary that, at the time when Balfour, with what the Irish aptly named his "pretty Fanny's way," was doing his best to kill that spirit, and Asquith had allowed fashionable society to turn him away from Radicalism, and even John Morley preferred the discussion of Greek literature to politics and purred over the supper-table decorations at a Londonderry House reception.

"We shall stand by and for the people," Hardie wrote.

"We shall, if need be, fall with them, but we shall not desert them, nor sacrifice their interests to any spirit of time-serving political expediency. We are of the workers ; they are our kin ; we are part of them ; their battle is our battle ; what hurts them hurts us ; where they gain, we

gain ; and, remembering the heroism of their toilsome lives, we shall, as a Party, seek to create conditions in which their nobler aspirations, which we know to be buried under the load of their poverty or petrified by their sordid surroundings, shall have free play."

Happy for Hardie that he could not foresee the future actions of many to whom he addressed these sincere, stirring phrases. He believed that he was speaking for all of them as well as for himself. Yet even then one of his disciples was betraying him. Andrew Fisher, an old acquaintance of Hardie's in Ayrshire, had become Prime Minister of the Australian Commonwealth. When he visited London, Hardie was surprised at his aloofness. One day, in a room where he and Fisher and his brother, George Hardie, were alone, he asked the reason for it. Being pressed to reply, Fisher said Ramsay MacDonald had warned him against being too friendly with one who was in public estimation a public danger.

In justice to MacDonald and others whose ambition was of the personal kind, it must be remembered that Keir Hardie's outspoken and unmistakably genuine belief in the needs for revolutionary change was a hindrance to members of his Party who longed to be Cabinet Ministers and saw that "political expediency" would serve them far better than trying, without thought of their careers, to make converts to Socialism. Reading A. G. Gardiner's remark at the head of

this chapter about Hardie's unfitness for leadership, one can agree that events appeared to justify it. But the chief reason for that appearance did not lie in Hardie's temperamental inability to lead.

He could not have created the Party without marvellous ability to draw men and women after him. When he had created it, he had two difficulties to fight against — first, his bad health ; second, the gulf between his idea and the ideas of most of his followers as to the line the Party should take. They were for " respectability," for " gentlemanly fighting." To Hardie this seemed contemptible — and futile. It might get a Cabinet of Labour Ministers into office. It would never convert the masses to Socialism. He was for hard hitting. When he spoke of the nation, he always made it clear that he meant the workers. He would tell his audiences :

" The nation is yours when there is debt to pay, it is yours when there is blood to shed ; but if you attempt to rule it, you are told that you are interfering with what does not belong to you."

When he replied to attacks by religious leaders, he did it with gusto. A temporary head of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, who sneered at " paid agitators," was asked to say " what stipend he is paid for being a parish minister and whether he is not also a paid agitator who leads his congregation by the nose."

When a Duke of Hamilton died, Keir Hardie pointed out that he received fourteenpence for each ton of coal he graciously allowed to be dug, while the miner who went down into the bowels of the earth to dig it and send it to the surface received just half as much – sevenpence a ton.

“What were the claims which this man had upon society that he should be able to tax society to the extent here indicated? He came from a long line of ancestors whose historic record proves that they were vacillating, shifty, and treacherous when it served their purpose. It is not easy to discover in that any claim to our gratitude. . . . And yet a people professing to be ‘democratic’ or self-governing submit to a rule under which this man was able, not only to extract hundreds of thousands of pounds a year from the wealth produced by their labour, but to say that they should not be able to labour at all without his permission. . . . Liberal may succeed Tory, and Tory succeed Liberal in the seat of power – all of them representing the common people – and yet the power of territorial magnates such as this one will remain unchecked. Truly we are a great people, democratically governed.”

That shocked the susceptibilities of politicians destined to hobnob with dukes and marquises, to bear titles themselves, to become pillars of the “democratic” system at which Hardie giped. They were not less disturbed by his plain speaking

about speculators in coal, who put up prices in the middle of winter and make it harder for millions of poor folks to warm their dwellings. He sketched "a little tragedy in three acts." In the first, poor people, chilly and damp, were crowding round a handful of fire in the grate. The second act showed the colliers preparing for "a grim battle to secure some approach to a living wage" in an age which had seen mine-owners gain unexampled fortunes. Scene of the third act - a Coal Exchange, where "well-groomed, capable, alert men made their living by selling what they bought for more than they had paid for it." The curtain falls on their raising prices - 3s. a ton in the better kinds of coal, 3s. 6d. a ton on that used by the poor; and "standing each other champagne suppers over their stroke of luck."

Then Hardie turned to a conference held in Cardiff "to consider the social problem and the relation of the Christian Churches thereto." Someone taking part in this had suggested, as the thing most needful, "a change of heart." This brought the article to its climax. Were not the Cory Brothers, who operated on the London and Cardiff Coal Exchanges, men whose hearts had already been changed? They had a reputation for princely support of Christian work. Well, the central fact was this :

"The respectable, church-going men who are, without cause, raising the price of coal in

the depth of winter, and raising it most against the poor, are worse than common cheats and robbers. They are robbing the poor, not merely of money, but of comfort, of health and, in some cases, of life. They are worse criminals than the cut-throat and burglar. You have a chance to protect yourself against these, but you cannot escape the others. They may attend church or chapel regularly ; they may be respected members of society, patriots and loyalists, but they are robbers all the same.

“Time was in England when, by the law of the land as it then was, every one of them would have been hanged by the neck until they were dead, as pests and enemies of the people. They have themselves changed the law and made their robbery of the poor legal ; but it is robbery none the less.”

To mention the names of individuals was, in the view of all the “Lib-Labs” and most of the Independent Labour M.P.s, “not playing the game.” It was no game to Hardie. He could not see why those who robbed the people should be spared. Nor did he shrink from addressing truths to Majesty, however disgustedly his House of Commons colleagues might murmur, “Bad form !”

King and Queen announced a visit to Merthyr. He printed in a Merthyr journal an outspoken, dignified open letter to them. He suggested they were being taken there for two reasons, first, to

give a hint “ that an advanced Socialist and Republican like myself is not the sort of member whom the workers should send to represent them in Parliament.” This political use of royalty he viewed with composure. Of the other motive for asking them to visit Merthyr he wrote with more concern.

The Dowlais Iron Works, where they were to lunch, had made the families which owned them — the Guests, the Keens, the Nettlefolds, the Crawshays — “ wealthy to an amazing degree ; enabled them to become great landed proprietors.” Yet these families had done nothing out of their profits for the town. “ There are no public buildings, monuments, public parks or public institutions due to their generosity in civic patriotism.” Indeed every effort to improve the amenities of the town “ had been fought bitterly by the representatives of this great firm,” which, moreover, had been “ the worst sweaters of labour in the whole of Wales.” They had been forced, by the British Government, and those of the Dominions, threatening the removal of contracts, to grant their workers trade union rates and conditions. But the firm had victimised a number of moulders for this defeat inflicted on it by keeping them out of work ; its reputation was consequently bad.

“ The reason why the astute gentlemen who are arranging this trip have decided to take you to Dowlais and to have you entertained by the firm may now be clear to you. It is that the

principal shareholders, who are leading lights in the social world in London, Birmingham, and elsewhere, may be rehabilitated, white-washed. This does not appear to me to be a very kingly office."

An appeal to the King to make enquiries was apparently successful. The royal visit to the iron works was paid, but before it occurred the moulders were all back at work.

A still more straightforward comment on the use to which royalty was being put by

"the reactionary classes, anxious to break the power of Democracy and weaken, and finally destroy, the power of Parliament,"

was offered by Hardie when King George intervened in the Irish Home Rule Bill dispute. The Bill had been passed three times by the Commons, three times rejected by the Lords. Ulster was arming and drilling to resist it, if it became law. Then the King called a conference at the Palace. It seemed possible that by the combined weight of Sovereign, Tory Party, House of Lords, and Liberal Cabinet, the House of Commons might be paralysed. This "new departure," as the King himself called it, seemed to Hardie to be "a challenge to Democracy," which was likely to cause the Republican slogan to be heard, and "a sloppy Liberalism along with a reactionary Toryism to be swept before the indignant wrath of an angry and enlightened people."

To which most of Hardie's Party answered with an agonised "Hush, hush!"

Intrigue against him had started long before. Attempt was made to prevent his being elected chairman. In the year after his election he threatened to withdraw from the Party because it declined to share his enthusiasm for the Pankhursts' Suffragette movement, aimed at securing votes for women. He was for straightforward support of the demand; he believed it to be both just and necessary that the electorate should include all citizens, women as well as men. MacDonald and Henderson did not take that broad view. They looked at the matter tactically, in terms of votes. Would Hardie's policy win elections or estrange possible Labour voters? To-day the whole affair has the aspect of a fire in a straw-yard. It blazed up and was soon over. The more prominent Suffragettes treated Hardie, their staunchest friend, with the same irritable, spiteful silliness which made them shout at, ridicule, and assault their most obstinate enemies. He was interrupted, caricatured, attacked even. Surprisingly patient, he still did his best to help them. When Mrs. Pankhurst became a frenzied recruiting agent, and Christabel took to expounding the Bible as the literal "word of God," many aspects of their campaign that had puzzled even their admirers grew clear.

This and other differences of opinion led to misunderstandings and bad feeling in the Labour Party. Soon Hardie was writing :

“ If politics and politicians seem as petty and peddling to others as they have seemed to me of late, then I do not wonder at the apathy and indifference of the crowd. And yet politics could be made inspiring and made to loom large in the outlook of the people. But only by the inspiration which comes from a great cause nobly and fearlessly championed. Surely it is to give that inspiration that a Labour Party has come into being. If not that, then what? ”

Had nobility and fearlessness been qualities common among his following, he would not have laid down the chairmanship “ with the feeling of one liberated from bonds,” as his friend Bruce Glasier put it. Had there marched behind him men as single-minded and as earnest as he was himself, he would have commanded Labour’s striking force with as much success as crowned his creation of it. Had he been in the full tide of vigour, he might have done wonders even with the material to his hand. But he was a sick man. He could not keep sufficient check on disruptive elements. In 1909 he insisted on leaving the I.L.P. executive because the Annual Conference declined to support him against a rather absurd young man named Grayson who disputed his authority. As soon as the delegates saw what they had done (MacDonald, Bruce Glasier, and Snowden resigned with Hardie), they hastily swallowed their defiance, declared

that they had not meant anything by it, and begged that the resignations might be withdrawn. But they were not withdrawn, though after a few months the incident was almost forgotten. The young man Grayson disappeared, and the Labour Movement saw that Hardie was right when he had said :

“What the Capitalist class fears is not neurotic shouting, but steady, plodding, undermining work, which will bring the whole structure about their heads.”

Of this work he was able to do less and less. He took a cure, on doctors' urging, “settled down to the task of getting well as I would to the fighting of a by-election,” dressed and undressed six or seven times a day to undergo treatment of one kind or another. He felt that “to leave the job half-finished would be fair neither to myself nor to those who look to me for guidance.” Some days “the Angel of Hope was on the wing,” on other days “Giant Despair is around, then both the present and the future are bleak and grey.” What was he to do with the leisure which his doctors forced upon him? He must take it easy, they said. He who had never worked at any but the fullest pressure! He could not trust himself to go slow; yet he knew that, if he went at his usual pace, he must collapse. He decided on a trip round the world, though he was, he confessed ruefully, “an indifferent sailor.” He

had, however, enough humour to make him see the funny side even of seasickness. Once, before crossing the Channel, he had listened to a friend who recommended cider as a sure preventative. It did not prevent him from being ill. Starting for Ireland, he related that experience to someone who was seeing him off, and was told, "That must have been sweet cider ; you want something dry." "So," said Hardie, "I got a copy of the Scottish Parish Councils Act." That saved him, even though two cattle-drovers sat by him in the saloon and talked about eating raw fat bacon and raw liver with blood running from it !

Often it has been suggested that Hardie was without humour. No one who knew him, no one who read him week by week in the *Labour Leader*, could be so mistaken. His sense of fun often obtruded itself into places where it caused surprise, and, to solemn persons, annoyance. In a list of rules for the organisers of political meetings, he included these :

"Meet the speaker at the station and have a nice fresh-made cup of tea ready for him. To be lugged off to some dirty, sloppy coffee-house does not put a speaker in the happiest frame of mind.

"Don't stop to introduce your 'distinguished friend' to every local nobody you meet. Your distinguished friend is very bored thereby, and resents being put on show.

"Have the ante-room to the hall open

and the gas lit. Hanging about a staircase or passage while someone hunts for the janitor or the key leads to profanity.

“Don’t go up to the speaker at the close, with a look as if you had designs upon his watch and enquire what his expenses will be, especially if he has agreed with you beforehand.”

The antiquated ceremonial of Parliament amused him immensely. He described once a visit to the House of Lords :

“Their lordships were at prayers when we arrived and we had to wait outside till they had finished. On being admitted we found seven Peers present, the Chancellor on the Woolsack, and the Clerks at the table.

“One of the Clerks rose solemnly and mumbled something which nobody could hear ; then a noble Lord, moved by a sudden impulse, rose in his place, but sat down again without uttering a sound, though he looked about him in a dazed, bewildered fashion.

“Then the Chancellor shifted his position a bit, and the Clerk mumbled something else, whereupon the Chancellor edged back to his place.

“Thus was the dumb show continued for exactly seven minutes, when their Lordships, thoroughly exhausted with their labours, rose for the day. They had passed four Bills, either through Committee or through a Second or
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Third Reading. One shudders to contemplate what would befall the British nation had those Bills become law without that seven minutes' sitting, with its preliminary prayer."

In another article he sketched the opening of Parliament. Here is the procession which summons the Commons to the House of Lords, where the King's Speech is read :

"First comes a police official, a fine, burly, competent-looking man ; behind him follows a most melancholy-looking old gentleman who would make the fortune of an undertaker by going out as a mute to funerals. He wears black cotton gloves, his hands are crossed in front of his paunch, and he moves sadly and solemnly behind the police officer. It might be a procession to the scaffold, so serious does everyone look.

"Behind the mute comes 'Black Rod.' He is gorgeously arrayed, not exactly in purple and fine linen, but in scarlet and gold lace. He moves for all the world like an automaton worked by some machinery which is out of gear. If you have ever seen a cat, daintily picking its way across a roadway on a wet day, you have some idea how this official approaches the House of Commons."

All this "ridiculous tomfoolery" was to Hardie "quaint without being impressive."

“Time and circumstances have changed during the last thousand years, but the forms of these Parliamentary institutions remain practically as they were, which is typical of much that goes on inside their walls.”

Yet he could see the comicality of them, just as he could make fun of an early automobile which made it difficult for him to get about in Wales during an election.

“I will bear free testimony to the truly democratic spirit which animates this invention. After carrying us a few yards, puffing and snorting and blowing steam in our faces, it would plant its fore-wheel firmly against any loose metal that happened to be around and call upon us to come out and lift it tenderly over. The understanding seemed to be that it always carried us down-hill on condition that we pushed it up the hills. Nothing could have been fairer, despite that fact that the road was mostly uphill.”

There was often a touch of comicality about his handling of public affairs. When he was summoned for “obstruction” at a spot where right of meeting was claimed, he told the magistrate mildly that he had 473 witnesses to call. The case was promptly dropped.

Hardie was not often in humorous vein during his world tour, but he gave a sardonically amusing account of an incident which, he said, illustrated

the spirit of British rule in India. He was to be shown over a prison and was waiting, with some Indians, for the local magistrate.

“To understand what followed, let it be borne in mind that we were standing outside the prison walls ; we were not within any fence or enclosure, but on a pathway, running through an open field, which led to the prison gate. When the magistrate came up I stepped out from my group of friends to meet him, and after conversing for a minute or two we were about to proceed towards the prison gate when he suddenly wheeled round and, speaking in an identical tone with that used by the warders to the native prisoners at the Singapore Gaol, he shouted, ‘Get off the prison compound.’ . . . He kept shouting at intervals of about twenty seconds, ‘Get off the prison compound, the public road is your place.’

“My feelings were those of shame and humiliation. After the native gentlemen had gone, the magistrate followed them with his eyes until they were back on the main road. Then he turned to me and said that we would now go inside. It took me about twenty-five seconds to express my opinion of him and his conduct, at the end of which time I left him standing where he was and joined my friends.”

He managed even to put a little fun into his speech of thanks for the fervent welcome given

to him on his return from the world tour by a meeting of 10,000 people. He was enquiring what could be the cause of their enthusiasm, and found it in this — that he had never tried to please anyone, not even the Labour Party. "His whole work had been an effort to make peace with his own conscience." He recalled the schoolboy's essay on Honesty — "It is our duty to our parents to be honest until we are old enough to know better," and said he had "never reached a stage in which he could afford to be anything else but honest to himself."

No man ever obeyed more firmly the counsel of Polonius : "To thine own self be true." He could not be untrue, even when it would have been more convenient without demanding sacrifice of principle. A man like Arthur Ponsonby might be attracted by his "uncompromising directness and complete indifference to the approval of the majority." Others misunderstood or were baffled by it.

"He was often," Ponsonby said of him, "blunderingly tactless and rough ; he never indulged in the little complimentary politeness which some find make life smoother." Thus he would dispense with the usual formalities of public speaking. He would begin a speech with, "Men," or, "Men and women." All this seemed to Ponsonby to be "part of the armour he wore deliberately against the insinuating influences of unaccustomed surroundings, to which men brought up in a very different sphere

of life not infrequently succumb." But that was the idea of a man brought up in Court surroundings. Hardie used no armour – he needed none. He considered the House of Commons (his daughter has told us) "a very dangerous place, especially for Labour M.P.s, who were apt to be so dazzled and impressed as to lose their heads and lose sight of the work they had been sent there to do." But there was never any risk of that happening to him. He shrank from the mode of life in vogue amongst the rich. He genuinely preferred for his evening meal a pot of tea, brewed by himself, with bread and butter or Scotch scones, to a dinner of daintily cooked meats. He made his own bed ; he cleaned his own boots – and he liked doing it. He had an aristocratic disdain for any way of living which did not seem to him to be natural. There was no deliberation in his attitude ; it was instinctive. He shrank from any act or form of words which struck him as affected or artificial. This did alienate many, but it would be hard to believe that anyone who knew him apart from public affairs can have resisted his geniality, his kindness, his enjoyment of the gentler sides of life.

That children and animals at once made friends with him proclaimed his true character. They loved his directness, the simplicity with which he met them on their own plane. A good part of the joy he had in going home to Cumnock lay in the welcome that awaited him from his collie. Children delighted in his stories, and

their interest delighted him. He told, with pleasure, of an incident that broke the grimness of his visit to Johannesburg.

“The street was wide and brilliantly lit, and a cordon of police kept a space round the hotel. When I appeared to go to my meeting, the usual howl was set up by the crowd ; but just as I reached the middle of the street a child broke loose from the footpath and, rushing towards me, clasped me round the legs and looked up and laughingly greeted me. She had been a passenger with me on the boat and we had become very great friends, thanks chiefly perhaps to a daily supply of chocolate. But it was sweet of her to run out and greet me.”

True to himself always, he would never pretend to be anything else. And now there fell on him, weakened by illness, shaken frequently by attacks of exhaustion, in his last years a harder testing of his nature than he had yet known. That there was real danger of European war he had known for many years, though he would not allow that “it had to come” ; he condemned Blatchford and Hyndman for stirring up hatred against Germany.

“They seem to have set themselves to the task of producing that very feeling of inevitableness than which nothing could more strengthen

the hands of the warmongers on both sides. Is that work worthy of the traditions of Socialism ? ”

At Socialist congresses on the Continent he had urged preparations for a general strike as a method of preventing war, without at first seeing that a general strike can be used with effect only as a revolutionary weapon. Later he recognised that an international strike against war would be of itself a revolutionary movement ; but he proposed merely to use the threat of it so as to prevent Governments from “ taking the risk of sending their armies abroad.” He still held to his belief that there need be no actual revolution, though he saw clearly enough that “ only the inspiration which comes from Socialism and the international binding together of the Trade Union and Socialist movements will ever put the workers in the position of controlling Governments, thus bringing war to an end.” So he wrote in 1914, just before the War, feeling “ dreadfully helpless.” He had said, in 1910, that he did not think the workers were then ready to strike against war. He clung to the hope that they would be ready when the time came. It was the disappointment of that hope which killed him. His life work seemed to be shattered. His daughter has written that “ he had not the strength to go on.”

For several years he had put Peace in the forefront of his appeals to workers in his own and other countries. Opposed to war, the I.L.P.,

under his guidance, had always been. In 1898 he had, at one of its annual conferences, sketched in outline policies of which Norman Angell and President Wilson were later on to fill up the details. The reason for war, he said, was the desire for markets. But when land was grabbed, it proved generally of little use, or difficult and costly to retain. In the past, when the sword constituted the only court of appeal, war had to be. But, the old reason for it having passed away, war should go also. There lay the germs both of the League of Nations and the "Great Illusion." Of course, therefore, Hardie saw the danger of Grey's policy - linking Britain with France and Russia in opposition to Germany; it pointed to war, and the secrecy with which it was hedged about made it the more alarming. The nation did not know what was being undertaken in their behalf. Why keep the nation in the dark, he asked, if there was nothing the Liberal Government was ashamed or afraid to make public?

"We are a democratic people, believing ourselves to be popularly governed, and we allow the Government to work like moles in all that pertains to foreign relations."

Ironically he wrote that he supposed the House of Commons "would be allowed to say a word or two before war began."

In the House he said many words about War

Minister Haldane's schemes intended to create "a nation in arms." He had denounced Lord Roberts's plea for conscription. The War Office proposals "avoided the hateful word 'compel,' " but were certain to lead to conscription. To that he had no objection, if it were a necessary measure of defence, as he thought it might be in Australia. He preferred an armed nation to a professional army – provided that it was controlled by a Socialist Government. The British Territorial Force seemed to him to be objectionable, not only as "an army of workers officered by rich men," but because there was no need for it, if our foreign policy were wisely framed. It could not, he argued, be needed unless the Government anticipated war. We know now that Haldane did anticipate it. His clearer intellect was not clouded, as those of Grey and Asquith were, by the vague hope that some lucky chance would cause the avalanche they had started to stop of its own accord. When it crashed on an unsuspecting world, the plans prepared under Haldane's direction were the sole indication that any precaution had been taken, any foresight used. Had Hardie known all that was then hidden, he would, while still condemning Grey's policy, have given Haldane credit for being the one man in the Cabinet who saw clearly what was bound to come of it and who prepared accordingly.

The pitiful failure of Socialists in Britain, France, and Germany to resist the war madness

struck Hardie a mortal blow. He sent his thoughts back to the Congress of the "International" during the Russo-Japanese War, when the Russian and Japanese delegates embraced in public. That, he had said exultantly, was worth living for. Now all his hopes were broken. "If there is such a thing as what the theologians call sinning against the Holy Ghost," he murmured, "our International Socialist movement is guilty of it."

Amid what he called "the roar and song of a war-maddened people" he shrank more and more into himself. He was denounced as a traitor; he was hooted and mobbed in his Welsh constituency. Most bitter experience of all, some of his friends fell away. When Morley asked him if his sickness of body was caused by the War weighing upon soul or spirit, he smiled a vague assent. For rather more than a year he lingered under the death-stroke he had received. "I am not able to fight through this, as I did through the Boer War," he lamented. At the last meeting of the I.L.P. Council which he attended he fell asleep like a tired child. In September 1915, his life flickered out.

To die of a broken heart is little more than a phrase. Hardie died of blows to his constitution that he himself had inflicted in selfless devotion to his aims. They would not have killed him at fifty-nine had he been able still to struggle against their effects. If the heart is the seat of courage, his courage failed because his heart was sore

stricken. He was a martyr in the cause of humanity ; a victim to the immense folly of mankind.

Yet his work lives, and grows every day stronger. His influence persists ; his example shines. What he did is seen to have been wise and necessary. What he said and wrote are still vital and stimulating. His place in the gallery of fame is secure, for he must always be a prominent figure in the history of Socialism, and the history of Socialism will be the history of the modern world.

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H. F.